SEPTEMBER 1st ISSUE, 1930
VOL. LXXV No. 6

ADVENTURE

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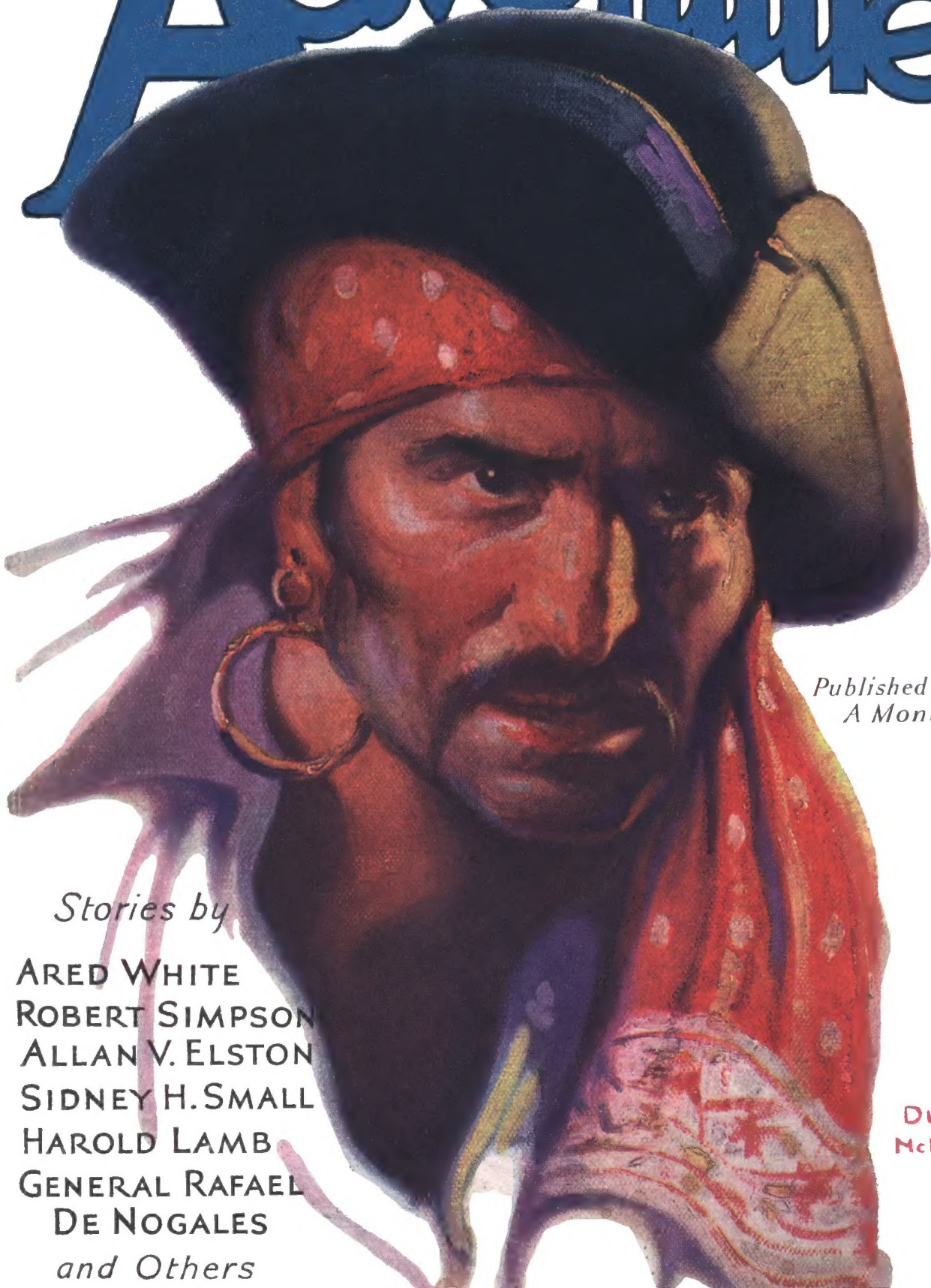

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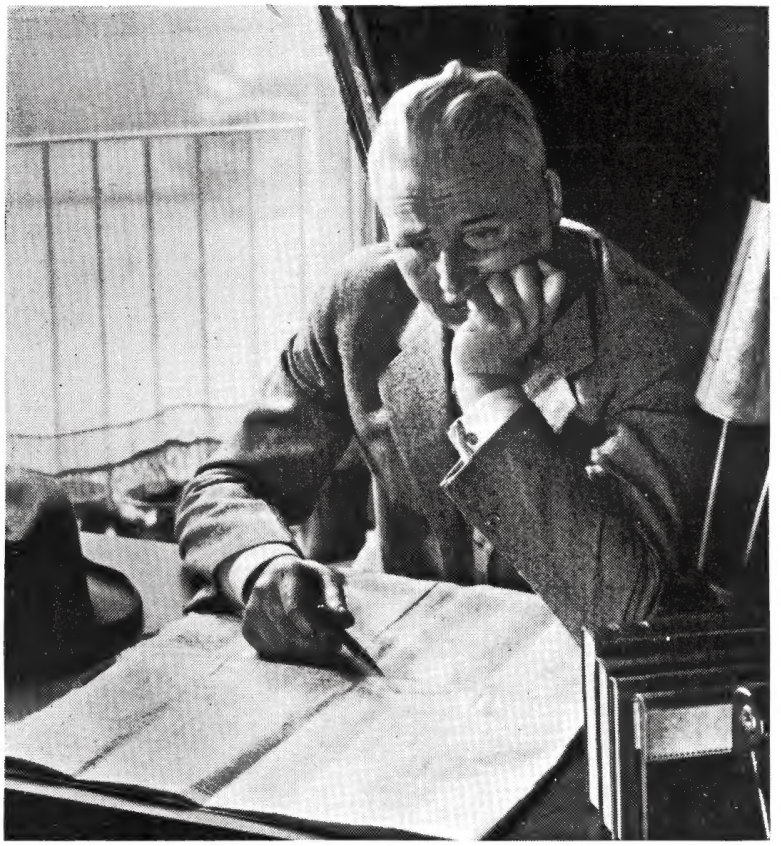

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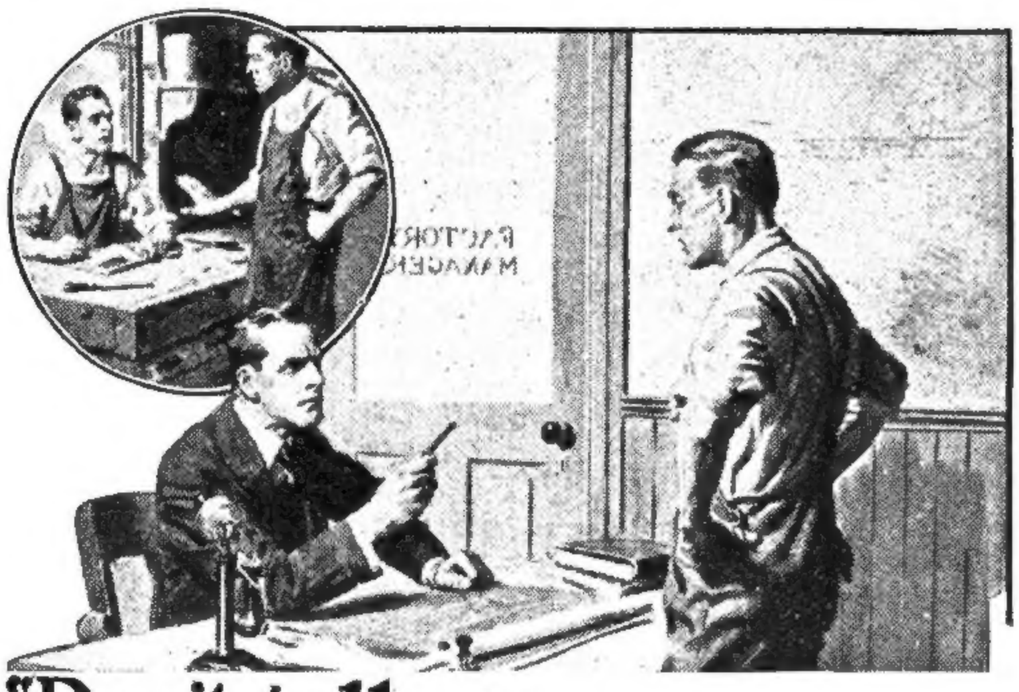

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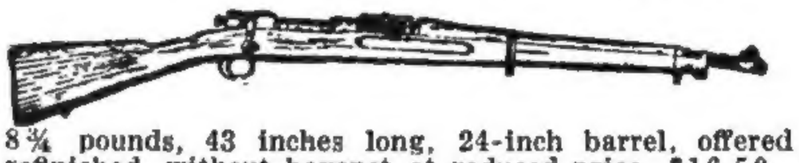

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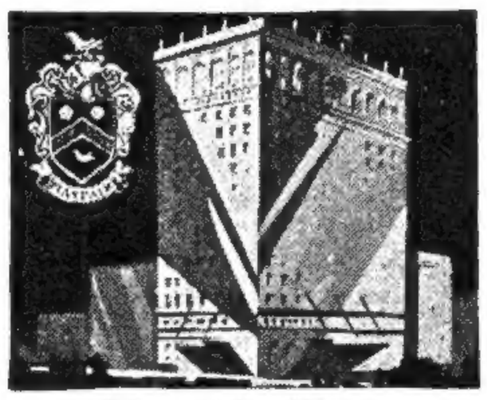

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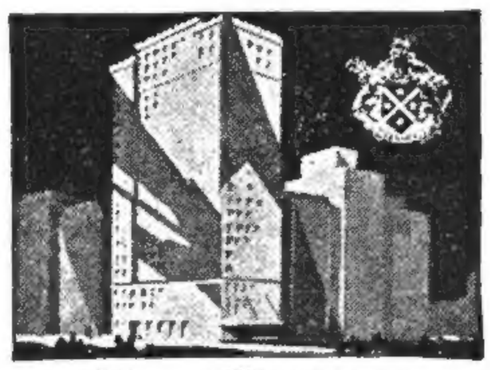

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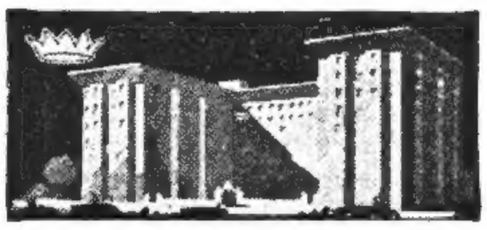

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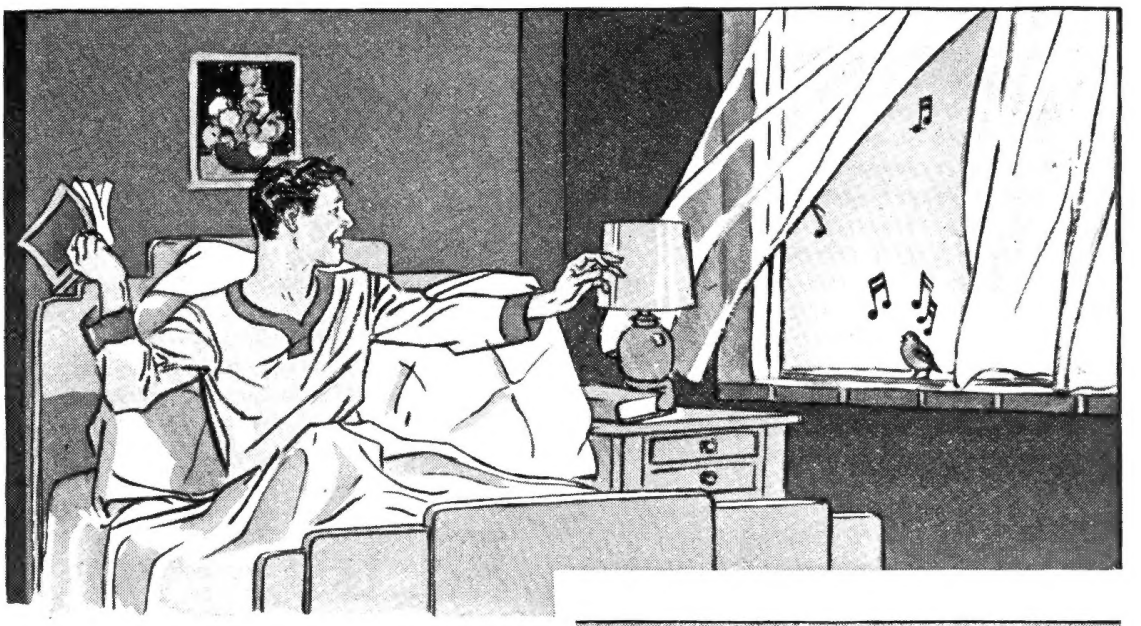

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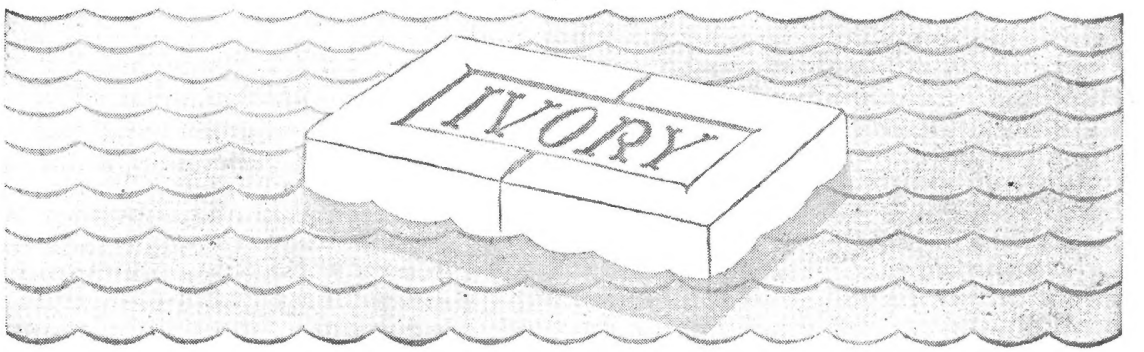

Adventure

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Cover Design by Duncan McMillan *Headings by H. M. Bonnell*

Published twice a month by The Butterick Publishing Company, Butterick Building, New York, N. Y., U. S. A. Joseph A. Moore, Chairman of the Board; S. R. Latshaw, President; B. C. Dunklin, Secretary; Fred Lewis, Treasurer; A. A. Proctor, Editor. Entered as Second Class Matter, October 1, 1910, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Additional entry at Chicago, Illinois. Yearly subscription $4.00 in advance. Single copy, Twenty-five Cents, in Canada Thirty Cents. Foreign postage, $2.00 additional. Canadian postage, 75 cents. Trade Mark Registered;

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The LONG SWORD

By HAROLD LAMB

IT WAS a time of hunger in the dry lands. When the Yamanite rode in with a bit of news, he bargained for it shrewdly, being hungry himself.

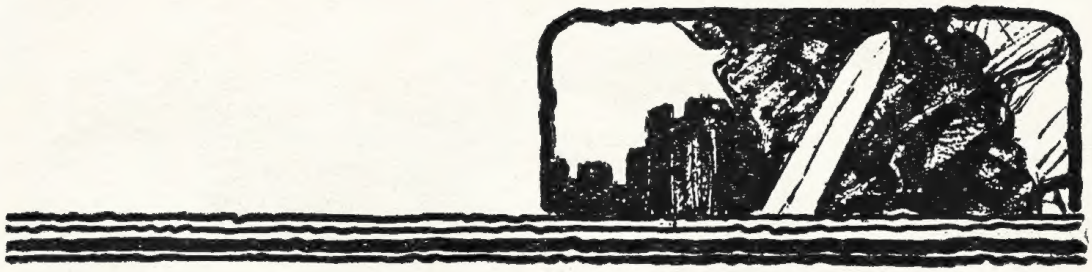
"Six riding camels they have, and twenty good horses," he said. And he watched the gray eyes of the man sitting above him in a chair. But the eyes told him nothing. "Aye, tents in the baggage, and women slaves," he added, for good measure.

"It is more likely," put in Khalil from across the table, "that thou art lying."

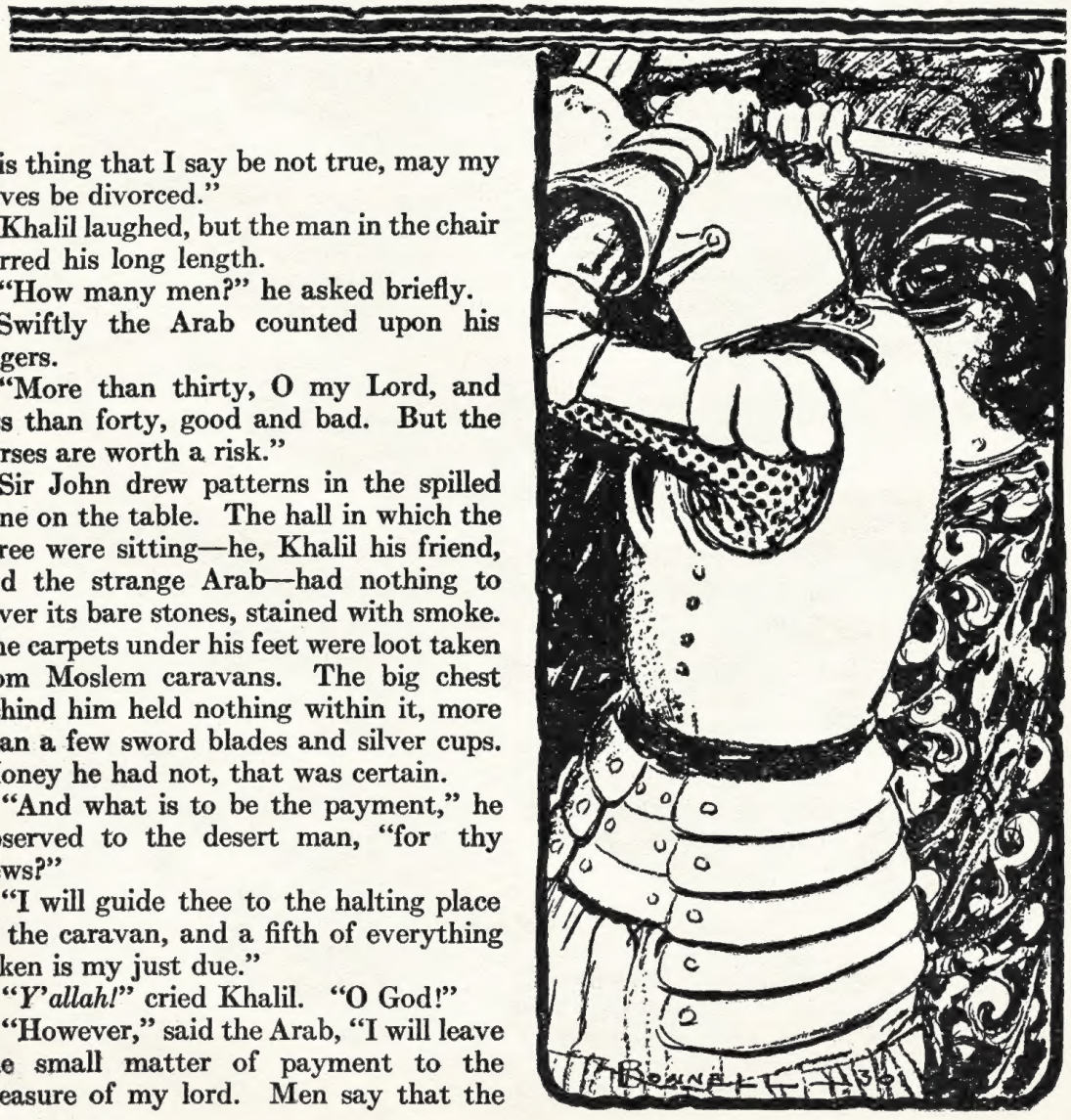
"Nay, I saw them. I counted them." The lean Arab from Yaman bent closer to the chair of the lord of the castle and whispered, "*Yah khawand*, it is truly an escort. It is not a raiding party. Perhaps they are escorting the family of an amir of the Hauran. That would be good plunder for thee, O my master."

"Where," asked Khalil again, "is this notable caravan?"

"In the valley—" began the Arab, and remembered to guard his secret. He thrust thin arms from his rags. "Is it not enough that I have sworn upon the Koran? Now—listen, ye Christian folk—I swear by the oath of the divorce. If



A Story of the Iron Men of the Crusades
by the Author of "Genghis Khan"



this thing that I say be not true, may my wives be divorced."

Khalil laughed, but the man in the chair stirred his long length.

"How many men?" he asked briefly.

Swiftly the Arab counted upon his fingers.

"More than thirty, O my Lord, and less than forty, good and bad. But the horses are worth a risk."

Sir John drew patterns in the spilled wine on the table. The hall in which the three were sitting—he, Khalil his friend, and the strange Arab—had nothing to cover its bare stones, stained with smoke. The carpets under his feet were loot taken from Moslem caravans. The big chest behind him held nothing within it, more than a few sword blades and silver cups. Money he had not, that was certain.

"And what is to be the payment," he observed to the desert man, "for thy news?"

"I will guide thee to the halting place of the caravan, and a fifth of everything taken is my just due."

"*Y'allah!*" cried Khalil. "O God!"

"However," said the Arab, "I will leave the small matter of payment to the pleasure of my lord. Men say that the

Long Sword hath a generous hand."

Sir John, whose name among the Arabs was the Long Sword, glanced out of the narrow arrow slit into the midday glare of the courtyard. Gray lizards scurried about the cracks in the stones, and black goats nosed in the shadows for the grass that had been plentiful enough after the last rains, but which was now an idle dream. He had been obliged to send his cattle to a distant valley, trusting to Providence that his Moslem neighbors would not discover the herd. His sheep were scattered all through the *wadis*, keeping alive somehow or other.

No rain had fallen that season in the desert beyond the river Jordan, and his wheat had dried in the earth. A month ago he had gone to Jerusalem to try to sell his sheep, without avail. He had gone to the abbot of Mount Sion to borrow a sum of money until the next rains, but the abbot would not lend to any one who held a castle on the border, beyond Jordan. The risk was too great. And Sir John of the Mount knew himself poverty ridden at last.

True, he had the Mount, a tawny mass of stones upon the limestone butte above the sycamore grove. A fair, strong castle, it was—the stones cracked by siege and by sun, yet still intact. His father, coming overseas in the crusade, had built it and now lay buried beside his mother under the stone flags of the chapel.

The Mount was manor of a thousand acres. Without rain, the land yielded nothing, and the granary held only dust. The Moslems had cut down his orchards in the last raid at harvest time, and the olive groves belonged to his Arab villagers whose domed huts clustered by the sycamores and the well below the Mount. The young lord of the Mount lived alone —so lonely that no priest cared to keep up the service of his little chapel.

Sir John, being noted for his skill with the sword, might have gained gear and gold and men to follow him, if he sold his sword to one of the great princes of Antioch or Acre.

But this was his manor and his birthplace. He had learned to cling to the back of his pony here not so many years ago; he had led his dogs in the hunt through the shrub pines by the highroad from Damascus. And John of the Mount came from a breed of men who do not leave their land.

He needed sorely those twenty horses and anything else the caravan might have. But it puzzled him. Good horses, pavilions, slaves, a strong escort—that might mean a woman. Yet why had the escort halted within his lands, even for the noon rest?

Silently he summed up the chances. He thought the Yamanite was speaking the truth. If the Arab had offered to lead them to the caravan without reward he would have suspected a trick. The trouble was, he had not men enough—even to garrison the Mount properly. If he left old Renald and five archers to watch the castle, he would have Khalil and six men-at-arms, mounted, with the usual volunteers among the Arab swordsmen of the village, who would pillage with a will but would not stand to fight. Not enough to overpower the caravan escort. And yet, Sir John had no mind to let a chance slip by.

"We will go and see if thou art lying," he said to the strange Arab. "Khalil, let him eat first."

"And my reward, O master of the Long Sword?"

"Thou wilt come with us," said Sir John. "And thy reward will be as God wills."

For leagues around the Mount the surface of the earth was gashed by rocky ravines known as *wadis*, through which ran streams in a time of rains. But now the *wadis* were dry and empty. On the plateau above them the intolerable mid-afternoon sun glowed against the white limestone and yellow clay. Sir John wore the native *khoufie* over his light steel helm, and over his shoulders a heavy black cloak to shield his mail from the sun's touch.

Under the drapery, his face was lined and somber, his harsh lips unsmiling. He watched for his sheep and saw nothing of them, and knew that they had been driven off by raiders, or by his own shepherds. When he came to the deep ravine the Arab pointed out he rode slowly and drew rein at its edge. For a moment the men from the Mount stared down into the shimmering glare and the dense shadows.

"What is thy name?" Khalil asked the ragged tribesman.

The Yamanite responded absently:

"*Malik ibn malik, Ibrahim ibn Sulaiman al Akabi.*"

"Son of Solomon thou mayest be, O Ibrahim," murmured Khalil, "but thou art a very father of lies. The caravan is not here."

"It *was* here—yonder in the shadow by the well that is the Well of Moses."

"Then it must have grown wings like the angels and flown elsewhere. Thou hast brought us to the wrong *wadi*—"

"Am I a fat sheep, not to know one place from another? Go and look at the dung of the beasts—"

"And am I a blind she-dog, to put my nose into a trap—"

"Peace, ye addleheads!" said Sir John, who had satisfied himself that the valley was empty. "We will go over and look at the road."

He was thinking of his sheep as he led the way along a cattle path that kept clear of the heights without descending into the gullies where they might have been set upon by the unseen Moslems. The path ended upon the shoulder of a hill and the young knight uttered an exclamation.

"Yonder is the caravan."

Under their feet wound the narrow highroad and, beyond it, in the shadow of a cliff, stood two silk pavilions. Horses —a score of them—were tethered beneath some olive trees. Men walked about idly, or stretched out in the sand. But the men wore cloaks and hose, and crossbows and spears were stacked by the baggage. Ibrahim squinted at them and shook his gray head.

"Nay, my Lord, this is another caravan. Certainly these are Franks."*

"Merchants," added Khalil, eagerly. "By the Lord, those are princely tents. Let us cross the road at another place and drop down upon them from the height."

Nothing would have suited him better, for Khalil was a Kurd of the north, with all the courtesy and the predatory instinct of his people. He had lingered at the Mount as a guest and he knew that the Christian barons of Jerusalem were not reluctant to glean plunder from passing merchants. But Sir John cantered down to the road.

The men in the camp took notice, running out and snatching up shield and bow, while a slender figure in black emerged from one of the pavilions beneath a parasol held by a slave.

"Who comes?" the man in black hailed the horsemen in Arabic.

"John of the Mount of Moab, vassal of the King of Jerusalem."

"Then throw back your pagan hood," the voice responded in Norman French. "And bid your children yonder keep their distance."

But the Arabs who had followed Sir John lingered down the road of their own accord. He did not dismount, although he pulled his horse in to a walk, and the men from the castle did likewise. For the youth in black seemed half minded to greet them with crossbow bolts. He stood his ground, staring at them coolly, clad in immaculate velvet, a heavy silver chain at his bare throat. An older man, even more richly dressed, had come out and seated himself in an armchair. Sir John knew them to be Venetians from the coast cities.

"The Lord of Mocenigo," said the youth of the chain briefly, "Comptore of Acre, and my father. What is your wish, Sir John?"

He spoke with a harsh accent of an Italian, and the careless arrogance of a Venetian who knew himself superior in wealth and culture to the rude crusaders. The elder Mocenigo leaned on his staff,

* Christians from Europe.

without words. But Sir John's eyes were upon the other pavilion.

The girl who stood there under the entrance canopy might have come from paradise itself. Not in all his years had the knight of Moab land seen such red-gold hair, shimmering against the blue of her robe. The young Mocenigo glanced over his shoulder and smiled—

"It is evident, good sir, you are not blind."

But the girl spoke impatiently.

"Is *this* the escort? Now by my faith, they are infidels and I like them not."

"Infidels they may be, my lady—" the younger Mocenigo bowed—"but escort of yours they are not. You will not find us so lacking in courtesy or care of you."

John of the Mount felt his cheeks grow warm. He had no skill in such polite phrases of cultured folk. He kneed his horse forward—he had not been invited to join the strangers, even to have a cup of wine. And still he stared down at the girl of the red-gold hair. Surely, so clear was her skin, she must be a newcomer in Palestine. He had not heard such a voice in all Jerusalem. And, with her eyes upon him, he felt himself grimy and ill at ease, and he did not wonder that his men seemed to her no better than a Moslem crew.

"Where i' God's name are you going?" he asked bluntly.

"To my uncle at Kerak," she said, "if it please you."

And he thought that she had no liking for his words. So he turned to the younger Italian.

"Then have you come upon the wrong road. Kerak castle lieth behind you." And when they were silent, he added, "It were best to take shelter at the Mount for the night."

"We give you thanks," said the young Mocenigo, "but we are camped here; and as for the road, we follow our own."

"Under whose safeguard?"

The Italian shrugged impatiently.

"This lady hath need of no safeguard where Christians hold the land, and my father is known from Aleppo to the desert. We need not Michael the archangel, nor his flaming sword."

And it seemed to the knight that he was being mocked. Again he dared question the fair girl who stood before the two older women—servants by the look of them.

"This uncle of yours, damoisel—how is he named?"

"You should know well his name," she replied instantly with a toss of her small head, "for he is the Lord of Kerak, and I have come from Chatillon to take shelter in his great hall."

The Venetian had spoken truly. Reginald of Chatillon was the most powerful of the barons who held the frontier, and more than once John of the Mount had gone with him on foray or battle quest.

"Is it your way, messire," she went on, "to ask such questions of those who fare past your hold?"

When she spoke to him, John of the Mount felt disturbed and irresolute in mind. Now he could not think of any words at all, and the younger Mocenigo smiled. Seeing this, the knight turned to him and dismounted.

"A word with you, messire."

Into the other pavilion he strode, flinging himself down upon an ebony bench. The air of the darkened tent was fragrant with the scent of sandal, the walls were hung with silk saddlebags, and serviceable chests stood against the two sleeping pallets. Upon one of these the old Mocenigo seated himself, caressing the ivory head of his staff, his eyes moving restlessly from his son to Khalil, who had chosen to sit unbidden in the shade of the entrance, and then to the giant Italian crossbowman who came to stand behind Khalil. The Mocenigo sire understood no Norman speech.

"Have you come hither, in truth," Sir John broke the constrained silence, "without the protection of the Moslems—of the amir of Damascus?"

The youth looked at him curiously.

"Why should we pay for a safeguard we need not? And what, pray, is this word

of yours we fain must hear? I have little joy i' this talk."

"Be that as it may, you are now upon my lands."

"The Well of Moses is yours?"

"The well here, at this spot, is dry. The Well of Moses lies a half league distant. Now this must be said between us: your men are not at home in this country, and you stand in peril of your lives. For yourselves I care not. But for the woman who is the niece of Kerak, I do care. Even now a Moslem caravan is within sight—know ye that?"

"By Saint Bacchus, I did not."

Many things were clear to the knight. These merchants had left the proper road; they had camped at a dry well. Strong as their following might be—they had nearly forty men-at-arms—they did not seem fit for desert travel. But the cold faces of the Italians were set against his warning. In this day and place no man might trust a stranger. Along the frontier few could be found who would not sell their kin for a good price.

"It is clear to me—" Sir John looked from one to the other—"that I must guard the damoisel across the desert to Kerak."

"What would be our surety, if we yielded her to you?"

"My word."

"Undoubtedly, your word is good." The younger Mocenigo smiled. "But we have pledged the patriarch of Jerusalem to deliver the maid, unharmed, to the Lord of Kerak—since we are journeying thither."

Sir John was silent a moment.

"Then," he said reluctantly, "I must join your company with my men."

The two Italians spoke together swiftly, and the elder fumbled in his cloak. He took out a small leather wallet, loosening the cord and letting a stream of coins run into his other hand. Replacing the gold, he tied the wallet and thrust it across the table to the knight. Sir John looked up inquiringly.

"Messire," said the younger merchant, "this is payment for intrusion upon your lands and for your trouble, otherwise. We have no need of your escort to Kerak."

The gray eyes of the swordsman gleamed, and again his cheeks flushed dark. He picked up the wallet, weighed it in his hand and tossed it across the table. Then he left the tent, summoning Khalil from an interested inspection of the Italian crossbow. The Kurd, after a glance at his companion's face, strode after him silently.

"Where is Ibrahim?" the knight asked.

Khalil nodded toward the horses. Ibrahim had taken possession of the rein of Sir John's charger and was squatting in the nearest shade, thus establishing in the eyes of the distant Arabs his right to serve the Lord of the Mount. He rose when the knight approached and held the stirrup.

"Ibrahim," said Sir John, "knowest thou this sword?" And he touched the steel pommel of the weapon at his side.

The sword, a long, curved saber of Damascus make, was an old blade, inlaid with gold, although hilt and pommel were plain. It had a broad head, sweeping to the point, and men said they had seen its owner take it within his fingers and bend point to pommel.

"Ay, verily," said Ibrahim.

"Then wilt thou feel it within thy ribs if thou liest to me, now." Sir John spoke under his breath, but the old Arab shivered. "These Franks of the caravan say that no Moslems have been seen near here. If thou hast lied in the first place, it is forgiven. Confess, and I shall not lay hand upon thee. But if *now* thou liest, it shall be as I said. So bethink thee and say truly whether the Moslem horsemen were by the Well of Moses."

The tribesman breathed deep, and his bent fingers twisted in the strands of his gray beard.

"All things are appointed by Allah," he replied wearily. "And it may be that this is the hour and place appointed for my death." He looked up into the crusader's eyes. "I know not what these others say, but I saw the camels and the men as I told thee."

Sir John gripped the pommel of his sword, then his hand dropped and he called to his men to mount and ride off.

"Nay, not to the road—to the gully yonder."

"What is upon thee?" Khalil asked; and added, "Why didst thou throw back the gold? It was a good sum."

"It would have made me no better than a dog," the crusader responded through set teeth. "And now there is trouble upon my head. Tell me, canst thou manage thy horse at all times?"

"Can I breathe?" Khalil wondered. "Can—"

"Then mount thy saddle and keep close behind me, and be ready to ride off at any instant. But go into the ravine after the others. Is this clear to thee?"

"Aye, certainly," muttered the Kurd, his lean face alight with curiosity.

For a moment Sir John surveyed the bare stretch of the road, the deepening shadow of the cliff, where the Italian men-at-arms loitered, having put down their weapons at the departure of the strangers. He even looked up at the summit of the cliff, and at the young Mocenigo who stood talking to the girl at the pavilion. Leading his charger, he went toward them slowly, Khalil pacing behind him.

"Damoisel," he said, "it is time to bid farewell."

Her brow puckered a little, as if she were trying to see the face under the shadow of the white silk.

"And yet—" she smiled—"I would not have thee leave, messire, without a cup of wine."

Although Mocenigo seemed ill pleased, she took a silver goblet from the serving woman and held it out toward him.

"Nay—" he laughed—"'tis time for thee to bid farewell to these others." And he tossed the goblet to the ground, slipping the rein over his arm. Bending forward swiftly, he caught her about the knees and the waist—turned and thrust her up, into Khalil's arms. "Now, ride," he said.

He moved aside as Mocenigo, snatching out a poniard, struck at him. Khalil, astonished, gripped his prize in a sinewy arm and wheeled his plunging horse. The crusader's charger snorted and started forward as the rein was slipped over his head. Sir John got a foot in the stirrup and was in the saddle when the Italian threw the long knife. It slapped into the crusader's cloak, the point catching in the links of his mail. Another moment, and the two horsemen were galloping clear of the tents.

"Bows!" screamed Mocenigo. "A thousand pieces to the knave who brings down a horse!"

But it took time to wind the crossbows, and when the first quarrels whined in the air the riders were passing out of range. And it took longer to saddle the horses, so that the two had joined their men in the ravine before the Italians were able to go after them through the turns of the gully.

"I will take the maid," Sir John said then, "and do thou look to it that they do not press us too close."

"By the Lord," grumbled Khalil, "thou art a fool not to have taken the gold instead."

MARGUERITE DE CHATILLON brushed some of the dust from the solitary bench with the edge of her skirt and sat down. She was quite sore in her slender waist and knees, because it is no light matter to be carried at a gallop over rough country. Moreover, she was very hot. The cool air in the dark tower chamber felt pleasant after the sun, but it did not quench her anger.

Everything in the cell, from the hard pallet to the crucifix on the wall, was coated with dust; and Marguerite had searched in vain for a mirror. The single narrow embrasure overlooked a courtyard full of noisy infidels and clattering men-at-arms—quite different from the quiet garden and the cloisters of Mount Sion. Marguerite sat very still and thought. When she heard a knock at the door, she shook her tawny hair back from her shoulders, and said quietly—

"Come in."

She was more than ready to speak her mind to the lord of this tower.

But a native woman appeared, her bare feet moving noiselessly over the stones. She carried clean linen and a mattress stuffed with straw and, after staring without any evidence of pleasure at the girl, she proceeded to make up the bed. A second woman entered with a silver tray bearing wine and grapes and a bowl of water. This Marguerite did not touch. Presently they came back hurriedly with a towel and a parchment book.

When they had gone, the girl picked up the book and opened the stiff pages. It was a book of psalms, and music. She replaced it on the stand and, since she did not cease to be thirsty, she had reached for the wine when Sir John came in.

She knew his height and his stride and the long sword in the curved leather sheath, although he was now fully clad in mail and he had discarded his headdress for a battle casque. Because this was a solid cylinder of steel with only a narrow slit before the eyes, she could see nothing of his face. So, she thought, he had the manner of a brigand, to enter a woman's chamber wearing his helm. But she said nothing at all.

"Will you not take some wine?" he muttered, standing rigid before her.

"I thank you—I will not," and she took up the psalter, turning the leaves indifferently. And when Sir John continued to watch her in silence, she went on, as if to make conversation, "Know ye, Sir Rogue, that the Lord of Kerak will come with his spears and break through this tower of yours, pulling stone from stone. He will hang your men and take your life for this hour's work."

The man in armor seemed to ponder this.

"He could do all of that," he said, "but I do not think he will." And he went over to inspect the bed. "Is this comfortable?"

Receiving no answer, he explained.

"This place is the priest's hole. We have had no woman at the Mount for years, and so we lack woman's gear of all kind. The Arab wenches say they have no sugared fruits or tidbits of such nature. But if you will tell me, damoisel, what other articles you may need—"

"Where are the chains?" she asked hotly.

"Chains—chains? Why, you may walk where you will!"

"Even from the gate?"

"Aye so, but not this day. The Venetians will be coming hither. But when we are rid of them, I will find you a fair horse, and the Mount lacks not falcons or hunting dogs for your sport."

"It is a most hospitable place," she assented. "But I find these same merchants more chivalrous than the Lord of the Mount, since they will adventure their lives for my sake."

If she could have seen Sir John's face then she would have known that he was sorely troubled and ill at ease. He had come to reassure the girl, but her talk of chains and chivalry set him aback. He knew so little of the language of romance.

"They must *needs* do it," he corrected. "If I have judged them aright. Did not they ask the patriarch to allow you to travel with them?"

Taking her silence for consent, he went on thoughtfully:

"This must be said. The Venetians were leagues from their proper road, and they told you they awaited an escort. Well, that is true. The Yamanite swore to me that he had seen such an escort waiting at the Well of Moses—a Moslem caravan, equipped for a woman's travel. Now the Venetians came to a dry well, which they took to be the Well of Moses. They would not come to the Mount for protection, nor accept aid from me. I could no longer linger in the plain with the Moslem riders within smell. So I carried you hither, damoisel."

The damoisel sat up very straight and opened her lips twice before she uttered a word.

"That is a clown's tale—a most stupid mummer's gibe. *Why* did you bring me hither?"

"So that you would not be sold to a

Moslem amir. The Venetians could have gained eight thousand gold byzants by selling you."

"For me—eight thousand pieces of gold?" She shook her head slowly. "Nay, that is surely false. No slave would bring such a price."

"You are fairer than any woman who ever set foot beyond the sea. God knows the truth of that. And yet it is true that the amirs would pay less for you than for some Persian singing girl who has been taught the ways of pleasure. But for the niece of the Lord of Kerak they would pay all of that, because the Lord of Kerak would have to ransom you, even at the cost of his castle. And he is the foe most feared by the Amir of Damascus."

"Messer Mocenigo did not take me to Damascus."

"Nay, to the Well of Moses, upon my land. If the Moslems came for you—a secret payment, a mock attack, and you would have been in their hands. And no accusation could then be laid upon the Mocenigos. The dogs offered me a purse, which would have tied my tongue."

"They said an escort from Kerak would be waiting here."

"And they told me they themselves were journeying with you to Kerak."

Marguerite wished she could see the face behind the cylinder of steel. The Venetians had been most courteous to her.

"And where, Master Rogue," she asked, "is the proof of this thy tale?"

John of the Mount wished that she could understand Arabic, for the Norman words shaped awkwardly here upon the border. What proof lay in a wolf's track, or the shadow of a hand uplifted? Yet by such things men lived or died here.

And then like a ragged prophet of Israel, the old Ibrahim swept into the room without apology of any kind. Where he came from, Sir John could not guess, because he had last seen the Yamanite scurrying into the brush of the ravine.

"*Wallahi!*" he cried eagerly. "Behold, my Lord, the caravan is here."

The knight strode to the embrasure, and for a moment the two men looked forth with evident interest. Then Sir John swung out of the chamber, calling to her over his shoulder to keep away from the arrow slot.

Before his tread had died down the stair, Marguerite was at the embrasure, and it seemed to her that pandemonium reigned outside the tower. Women were screaming and pulling cows through the courtyard gate. Dogs barked, and children tumbled over sheep. The whole Arab village was cramming itself within the walls of the castle.

Through the open gate the girl saw the familiar Italian horsemen riding into the village And with them came strange Moslem riders carrying a green banner and followed by a string of camels. Even while she watched, the gates of the Mount swung shut, and men-at-arms took their stand along the parapet.

Sir John thrust his way through the bedlam of the courtyard and climbed to one of the small gate towers with Khalil. For awhile she could see the Venetians and their companions ascending toward the rock. Then the wall shut them from sight, and presently silence fell like a curtain upon the courtyard.

She heard Sir John speak to men beyond the wall, but could not catch the words. Then he lifted his shield. Something bright flashed in the sun above his head. The men near him crouched down behind the stone parapet, some of them stringing their bows, others busying themselves about clumsy looking wooden engines. She heard the *thud-thud* of missiles striking against the tower.

One of the Arab women came and pulled her back to the bed, and she sat there, listening. At home she had seen no more of war than the tournaments of Chatillon, but her kinsmen had borne arms, and she knew the sounds of a siege.

For awhile she watched the slit of blue sky deepening with the purple of sunset and wondered what was passing at the wall. The tumult, that had quieted, now grew apace, and the Arab girl went to the

embrasure. Marguerite followed at once.

The sun was setting behind the tower and crimson light flooded the rear of the wall and the gate. The villagers had withdrawn from it and four men stood close behind it—Sir John and Khalil and two men-at-arms with axes. Bewildered, she saw that they were taking down the massive iron bars that held the portals shut.

When the last bar was free, they swung back the gates, clear of the entrance. And then all four of them took their stand shoulder to shoulder athwart the threshold, Sir John and Khalil in the middle, a pace before the others.

Above their heads Marguerite beheld a thing that made her clasp her hands, and the girl beside her breathed heavily. A score of men in mail, Moslem and Italian, rushed at the open gate, sword in hand. They shouted as they ran, and the wailing cry of Islam echoed against the tower.

"*Allah-il-allahi.*"

And with a spring and crash the wooden engines on the wall shot their stones and iron bolts. Some of the running men were dashed from their feet and others flinched aside. The rest flung themselves on Sir John and the Kurd.

The two swordsmen planted their feet, bracing their shields. Above their heads the long, curved blades swung, and slashed down. First one, then the other stepped back, and leaped forward again. At times the axmen behind them would strike over their shoulders.

The men on the wall were hurling down heavy stones, and the engines crashed again, over the tumult of shouting and grinding steel. More of the Venetians flung themselves against Sir John, and the long sword whirled and slashed—parried and cut while Khalil yelped in exultation and the archers above plied their bows.

Then the pressure of the attack ceased, and Marguerite saw men running down the slope. The glow of sunset faded along the wall and the gates were shut. But soon another glow sprang up in the village, where the mounds of hay and thorn bush were burning, and the Damascus men were plundering the huts. The village Arabs thronged the wall to stare down moodily at this destruction of their property. But Ibrahim the Yamanite slipped through the postern door in the rear, and when things quieted down toward morning he managed to steal two good horses from the besiegers' camp. With these he departed on an errand for Sir John.

MARGUERITE climbed the winding stair and seated herself upon the sunny parapet of the tower the next noon, to the delight of the solitary archer who stood sentry and who now found something more agreeable to look at than the bare countryside and the purple cleft of the Jordan gorge. And Marguerite beheld, in the camp of the besiegers, her own pavilion and the tiny figures that were her serving women. In that pavilion were all her clothes and brushes and chests. And yet even in the pitiless light of midday the girl seemed cool and fresh.

For a while she did not move, and perhaps she pondered the strange, hard land, the gnarled olive trees and the distant patches of grazing cattle—the heights of Moab, beyond the Promised Land. Only when a mailed tread grated on the stair she turned quickly.

A tall and grizzled man in a stained native cloak emerged from the stair and bade her a gruff good morning. This was old Renald—she knew him to be captain of the men-at-arms—and when he had scrutinized the camp under the sycamores she decided to make him talk.

"It was ill done," she observed, "to open the gate at vespers yesterday."

Renald grunted.

"'Twas Sir John's doing."

"But why?"

The old Norman turned upon her, scowling.

"Why, my lady? We ha' fourteen men, and they ha' near a hundred. If they had scattered around the wall we could not hold them off. So Sir John

says, 'We will invite them in at the door,' and they had many a woundy knock from our bolts and bows. Fourteen men!" He shook his head gloomily.

"It was a sore and bloody onset," the girl sighed. "But it was Sir John's doing. Is he friend to Sir Reginald of Kerak?"

"Aye," Renald muttered.

"Then you have sent a rider to Kerak, for aid?"

"Belike. An Arab went off that way last night."

It seemed to the girl that the Norman captain had not answered frankly.

"Of course," she said, "you are safe now, within this wall, until aid comes."

"Wi' fourteen men? Nay, Kerak lieth distant three days' ride, and the castle lacks food for two days."

"Then you must make terms with the Mocenigos."

"Terms? Not Sir John. Not wi' yonder parings of the devil's hoofs. The Mount will make no composition wi' blethering slave sellers."

"But they are honorable merchants and men of property in the cities."

"I doubt it not. There's a-many cattle thieves and slave traders who are men of property, my lady." He nodded sagely. "If they were true men, would ye be here, my lady?"

Marguerite told herself that this man had not seen her carried off from the tent the day before. But she could not help understanding that Renald and the men of the Mount felt that this siege was her fault, and she thought for a moment, twisting within her fingers the strands of her heavy hair.

"Will you tell your lord that I would like to—to speak with him?"

She waited in her cell, until Khalil appeared in the door and made signs to indicate that Sir John slept. She did not know that both men had been afoot during the night, and she sat in the dark chamber until sunset, when the impassive Arab girl came with her tray. Marguerite did not try to talk to her. She was weary of the silence and doubt, and she wondered if the lord of the Mount had been hurt in the fighting. The thought frightened her. At least the knight was master here and would let no other hand harm her. If he were dead . . .

Straightway she slipped out into the stair and felt her way down through the darkness. At the first turning she stopped, hearing men in talk within the hall below, and the familiar ringing voice of the knight. But they were speaking Arabic and the strange sound of it held no reassurance for her. Nor would she go down to be stared at by the men-at-arms.

Instead, she went back to her room. She had sent for the knight, and no doubt he would come after the meeting in the hall. Or at least send her a candle to light the room. But he did not come, and the tired girl felt hot tears upon her eyes. She threw herself down on the bed and cried herself to sleep.

And in utter darkness, late in the night, she was roused by a distant tumult. She ran to the embrasure, listening. Somewhere swords clashed and brush crackled. Torches flickered through the olive trees, and the darkness was astir with moving figures. Above the tumult rang out a battle shout that she knew well.

"Chatillon! Chatillon!" And again, "Kerak to the rescue!"

With a cry of delight she drew the hood of her robe over her head and ran down the stair.

BEFORE evening of that day Khalil had forgotten all about the girl in the tower—even that Renald had asked him to tell Sir John that she wished to speak with him. While the crusader ate a hasty supper, the two talked earnestly, and at the end the Kurd threw up his hands.

"Art thou weary of life?" he wondered.

"Aye, weary of sitting here until we are beset," Sir John said grimly. "Hast thou any love for the Italian crossbows?"

"Nay, certainly." Khalil shook his dark head emphatically.

These powerful weapons, that drove their bolts through shield and armor, were heartily disliked by the Moslem warriors.

"Well, at night such bows avail not at all, and a sword is the best weapon. And thou knowest the Damascus men will flee if the Italians give way."

"That is true. But cattle and torches and these Arab sons of sloth are no fit weapons."

The crusader laughed, for he meant to press everything into service—if only Khalil would agree to act with him.

"Thy people say," he suggested "'*At night a dog may be a lion.*' And our cattle may become something else. Khalil, the Franks outside offered me, before the fight at the gate, two thousand pieces of gold to give up the woman. Has it never befallen thee to know a girl more precious than two thousand byzants?"

"No," responded the Kurd, "never."

"It has befallen me." Sir John's eyes softened. "No hand but mine will be laid upon the girl I have brought hither, and the sons she will bear will be my sons."

Khalil nodded, intent on a calculation of his own.

"If the Franks offered two thousand pieces, they must have that and more in their chests, and the escort from Damascus will have much more. The spoil would be a good spoil. As thou sayest, it is better to go out than to sit here."

"Much better," agreed the knight. "Now I will go first, for the cattle and the herders wait. Ibrahim warned them, and Renald saw them at sunset from the tower."

Again the Kurd nodded.

"My part is easier than thine. But fail not to come, or we will be taken like sheep." He stood up and stretched lean arms with a smile. "It is written, and we may not read what is written."

So they went out together into the courtyard. And when Sir John's horse was led up, he glanced at the dark tower, thinking that he would like to have a word with his captive before setting out. But the women told him that she was asleep, and already he had delayed to argue with Khalil. He mounted to the saddle, spoke briefly with Renald, who was to hold the castle gate with one man and the village folk, and then rode from the narrow postern through which Ibrahim had slipped the night before.

For a while the courtyard was astir. Khalil counted off the ten men-at-arms who remained to accompany him, and he selected as many of the Arab youths, making certain that each one had arms and a horse. Then he waited patiently until Renald called to him that the tally candle showed an hour elapsed.

With his twenty following in file, Khalil left the postern and turned in the direction opposite that taken by the knight. Although the castle was between him and the camp, he led his horse carefully into the darkness, into a gully where the starlight did not penetrate.

The gully turned away from the castle, but Khalil and his men knew every rock of the path, and presently they assembled on rising ground that overlooked the distant embers of the besiegers' fires and the gloom of the sycamore grove.

Khalil peered down uneasily. He did not know how many men might be awake down there in the gloom under the trees, and besides, he could see almost nothing at all because he had Sir John's heavy battle casque on his head. And his left arm was already weary with the weight of Sir John's long kite shield. From side to side he turned his head like an uneasy wolf, seeing only the red glimmer of camp-fires and the yellow points of stars overhead.

"May Allah confound this steel pot!" he swore.

"What sayest thou, Lord Khalil?" a man-at-arms asked anxiously. "Yonder come the torches."

It had taken Sir John a good hour's persuasion to induce the wary Kurd to put the great helm on his head, but having given his promise to lead the attack, Khalil would not hold back. With a shout he spurred his horse and dashed down the slope.

"The Mount!" cried his men-at-arms. "The Mount!"

And they followed with a clatter of hoofs and jangle of mail, while the

Arabs behind them gave tongue. A wailing cry greeted them from the darkness, and arrows whipped by them. They were entering the camp of the Damascus men, and the sentries were wide awake. Cymbals clashed by the tents and an Italian horn echoed the clash.

Khalil swerved past patches of brush and pulled his horse out of a long stumble. He rode down a dark figure that seemed to spring out of the ground, and he careened into a tent. The pole of the tent swayed and came down upon other figures that struggled beneath the cloth, while Khalil's horse reared frantically and its master cursed anew.

Something crashed against the steel at his ear, and he beheld clearly enough the red flames that sprang before his eyes. An arrow ripped the mail links from his shoulder, and he lifted his shield in time to ward the smashing blow of a war club. Then his horse jumped clear of the tangle and, because the cressets hanging about the camp had been lighted, he saw that the warriors of Damascus were swarming out like bees, sword in hand.

Sir John's men had followed his example, and a half dozen tents had been overturned, while horses and running men leaped about the confusion like minions of purgatory welcoming a new host of the damned. Khalil cut the turban from the head of a passerby, and peered about, sawing at the rein of his maddened charger. A scimitar blade smote the mail upon his shoulders and he wheeled and slashed behind him, his sword sweeping vainly through the air.

Then the clatter of steel dwindled, and he saw the Moslems peering behind them. A greater sound filled the night, a stamping of reckless hoofs, a tearing of brush and a roar as of a freshet coming down a mountain. A black mass swayed and bore down upon the far side of the camp and on a knoll above it a strange trumpet resounded.

"Kerak!" A clear voice shouted. "Chatillon! Kerak to the rescue."

Torches flickered on the knoll, disclosing a horseman in full armor, a light steel cap on his dark head, a drawn sword in his hand. For an instant he halted there, and then repeated his battle shout and galloped down to the mass that was moving on the camp.

And Khalil laughed.

All this the Mocenigos had seen, when they were roused from sleep, and ran out to stare and listen. They were men of nimble mind, and when they heard the cry of Kerak both thought of the same thing—of a rope dangling from the bough of a tree and their own bodies dangling from the rope. For Reginald of Chatillon would do no less than that to any merchants who made shift to sell his niece as a slave.

Although not accustomed to war, they were equally swift to act. They hastened to their horses and, finding them saddled, called to the nearest Venetians. And with some dozen riders they galloped from the camp as if the foul fiend had been at their heels.

Khalil saw them and spurred toward them.

"The Mount!" he cried, and men-at-arms hurried toward him.

The Mocenigos veered off, and Khalil went after them, wresting vainly with the lashes that bound the intolerable casque upon him.

But other Venetians and Moslems had beheld the flight of their leaders. While the Damascus men hesitated, the black wave smote the camp and resolved into a bellowing and trampling herd of cattle that bore down the remaining tents and sent the frightened horses plunging into the brush. The men of Damascus had come hither to escort a lady and not to fight. When a strange knight charged at them with a strange war shout, and torches waved triumphantly upon the wall of the Mount, they took thought for themselves and vanished.

Only here and there did men stand against the lances of the riders from the Mount and the young Arabs, who were delirious now with the prospect of slaughter and loot together. And the gates of the Mount burst open. A stream

of old Arabs and women and boys emerged and bore down upon the fallen tents, to pillage in their turn. The remaining Venetians threw down their arms.

Marguerite of Chatillon hastened through the uproar, looking about her in vain for a familiar face. Stumbling over ropes and dodging frightened cattle, she made her way to where Renald had taken his stand by the Mocenigos' pavilion and her own, warding off with the help of some spearmen from the Mount the attempts of the Arabs to snatch away the spoils of the pavilions. But before she could reach him, a horse came up behind her, and she turned as Sir John leaped from the saddle to the ground. She drew a quick breath of relief and looked up into his brown face.

Strangely, he was flushed, and his shoulders shook and tears dripped from his eyes. And he spoke no word to her.

"Thou art hurt!" she cried, reaching out her hands to him.

He caught them and kissed them and found his voice.

"I am near perishing—"

"You are not!" she pulled away indignantly. "You are laughing, and there is no mark on your sword. Now, take me to my uncle."

"Damoisel," he sighed and wiped his eyes with a scarred hand. "I am Reginald of Chatillon, and Khalil is John of the Mount, and—oh, if you could have seen the Mocenigos flee in their shirts—while the cattle butted—"

He gazed around at the confusion and, seeing that the fighting was at an end, wiped his eyes again.

"But I heard my uncle's shout!"

"And have I not gone on raid and foray with Chatillon, not to know his shout? Oh, it was a notable and mighty charge we made, I and the cattle. We have captured your pavilion."

Marguerite looked at him curiously, beholding for the first time the youth and the laughter of the man who had seemed unbending as iron.

"Then you did not send the messenger to Kerak!"

"Nay, I sent off Ibrahim with a letter, to fetch a gray priest from Jerusalem."

"Sir John," she said slowly, "I have mistaken you, and now I think that you have risked yourself and this castle to aid me, and—and I will thank you, if I may. And now you will take me to Kerak."

The dark face of the knight fell serious.

"I shall not give up Marguerite of Chatillon to any man. And if Sir Reginald will have you, he must even take the castle, for you will be my wife, and he will need be a bold man to lift hand or eye to my wife."

Now Marguerite glanced up at him, incredulous, and the dark blood surged into her throat and brow.

"You dare? You would dare!"

And her eyes wavered, and then turning swiftly, she fled—ran like a shadow through the torchlight, up to the open gate of the Mount. Without heeding the din around him, the knight strode after her, into the courtyard and the hall.

Sir John was in time to see the flicker of a candle vanish up the winding stair, and with his foot on the first step, he hesitated. The exultation of the fighting throbbed in him, but now fear came upon him. Up there Marguerite had fled, and he was afraid of the darkness in her eyes and the blood that stained her throat. Surely he had frightened her, at whose feet he had laid his love—and surely now she lay stricken, fearing him. He dared not go up, to feel her eyes upon him and hear her weep, or scorn him.

But then he heard her clap her hands three times, and the Arab woman, thus summoned, brushed past him. So he paced the length of the hall, wondering how Marguerite would try to speak to the girl. And when the Arab came down and would have left the hall, he stopped her.

"Speak thou! Is my lady weeping, and what doth she seek of thee?"

"Thus, O my Lord, she doeth." And the girl held up her open hands together, first against one side of her face, then against the other, staring at them. "She must have—" the girl smiled—"a mirror."

MYSTERY SHIP

A Novelette of Crime and Detection

By ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON

WE WERE two days out of Cape Town when occurred the first of those sensational mysteries which, in each event, scattered our wits like foam on the sea.

Steaming obliquely northwest we were, across the South Atlantic. Four bells had just struck, of a starlit evening on a calm sea. I was in First Mate O'Brian's cabin, which was next to my own on the port side of the saloon deck of the bridge house. I, Earl Anthony, a mining engineer returning to America from the Kimberley mines, had bought passage on this tramp freighter merely because I could get it at the cheap price of twenty pounds. There were three other supernumeraries aboard who had bought like passage. The only man on the ship, however, with whom I had become friendly, was First Mate O'Brian. This evening he was off watch and I had stepped into his cabin for a game of cribbage.

Through his porthole came a lambent starlight and moonlight. Below us thrummed oil burning engines. Overhead we could occasionally hear the tread of

a man, or men, taking air on the bridge deck, which was the only deck likely to lure any one bent on promenade or star gazing; because the freighter *Good Hope*, be it understood, was of the three-island type. That is, from a distance and when under full cargo as now, her forecastle, bridge house and poop would have seemed like three islands connected by rafts. Later, when we were in full cry after crime, I drew a rude sketch of her port profile. After all these years I find that sketch still at hand.

It recalls to me certain vital loci and juxtapositions. First, that the fore-deck and after-deck were low and deep, almost flush with the water line. Second, that the bridge house, or midship superstructure, was, in the parlance of landsmen, two stories high above these low decks. Its roof was the bridge deck. On this bridge deck was first the bridge with its two covered sheds, namely the wheel-house and the chart-room; then came an open-to-the-sky space of deck around the funnels; aft of all on the bridge deck was the captain's cabin.

On a level eight feet below the bridge was the saloon deck, with the saloon in front. Back of the saloon on the port side were seven staterooms. Forward to aft they were: the purser's office, the purser's stateroom, my stateroom, O'Brian's stateroom, Ferber's, Cartright's, Dutwiler's. These seven cabins had doors giving to an interior passage, their portholes being flush in the port façade of the ship.

Our game of cribbage lagged. I pushed the board aside and asked O'Brian to tell me of his career at sea.

He told me that he had gone to sea at seventeen, and was now thirty-seven. There had been an interlude of three years, though, when at twenty-six he had quit his ship in New York and tried to earn a livelihood on land.

I wondered that he hadn't made good no land. To me he seemed a man of exceptional character and intelligence. His mind was sharp; prolific reading had trained it to the ken of many fields beyond the navigation of a ship. In physique he was a giant.

"What did you try your hand at in New York?" I asked.

O'Brian grinned broadly.

"What would you expect a twenty-six year old Irishman, six feet three by two hundred pounds, to try his hand at in New York? Sure and I got a job on the force and walked a beat in harness for two years."

"A policeman?" I marveled.

"And why not? For what job on land was I better fitted? Good pay, too; higher than I ever earned at sea. The third year I was promoted out of harness, and was in the way of being something of a detective. Then I pinched the wrong man, some big politician who wasn't supposed to be pinched. They broke me. I went back to sea."

It was at that instant that the first note of violence broke—overhead. The mate's chin tilted upward alertly. So did mine. We both heard a scuffle of feet on the open bridge deck, less than eight feet above our ears. Then, from the same source, came the bark of a pistol. Almost coincident with the shot came a piercing cry, unquestionably a shriek of distress.

O'Brian and I were now on our feet. I was staring over his shoulder. My eyes bulged, for I saw, beyond O'Brian, a well-nigh incredible apparition at the open porthole. I pointed. O'Brian whirled and he saw the same thing.

It was a human arm, clad in what seemed to be a blue serge sleeve, reaching in through that ten-inch circle of open porthole. What made it almost incredible was that there was no deck out there upon which a man could stand, the porthole being cut flush in the exterior façade of the ship. Yet there was the arm.

We only saw it for an instant. In the first fraction of that instant the hand, extending from the blue serge sleeve, was clenched. Then it opened, dropping an object about the size of a walnut to the floor of the stateroom. Then the hand and arm disappeared. I heard a splash.

I sprang to the porthole, stuck my head and neck through into the night. Ten feet below my eyes the starlit water was riffling gently against the side of the moving ship. I looked back along the waterline. I saw a bobbing dot; I knew it to be the head of a human, and I saw an upraised arm snatching frantically and futilely for a handhold on the riveted wall as it glided by. I ducked back into the cabin and cried "Man overboard!" at the top of my lungs.

O'Brian leaped out into the interior passage and raced up it toward the ladder ascending from saloon to bridge. He shouted—

"Man overboard aport!"

I heard the jangling of telegraphs. Almost immediately the ship began to lose speed.

I myself stooped and picked up that walnut-sized object which the grotesquely appearing hand had dropped in at the porthole. It was hard, sharp and bright. Its shape was octahedron. Under the cabin's light it gave forth a slight yellowish luster. But for its enormous size I would have recognized it instantly as an uncut, unpolished diamond.

But wasn't it? I continued to gape, transfixedly, at the heavy, sharp and almost brilliant octahedron balanced on my palm. Being fresh from the Kimberley fields, I had seen more than a few native diamonds. But never one so gigantic as this. I rubbed the thing. It looked slightly greasy but did not feel so. I recalled tales I had heard of natural stones, even larger than this. In growing excitement I continued to gape and wonder.

Conviction, at last, would not be denied. This thing, however magic the circumstance, was a real diamond. Its weight, I guessed, could hardly be less than a hundred and fifty carats. That, I calculated, would fix its value even in the rough at something like thirty-five thousand British pounds.

It awed me. I was at a loss what to do with it. I couldn't drop it back on the floor, unless I stood by to guard it. I didn't want to stand by, because I was keen to get out and watch the lowering of boats to rescue the man in the sea. That poor fellow, I realized, must now be well astern. Then I recalled there'd been a shot. Which suggested that the man had been shot and then pitched over the rail. If wounded, he could hardly keep afloat while the boats circled astern to pick him up. There was every chance that he had already perished. Of course there'd be a try for him.

I slipped the diamond into a pocket of my trousers and stepped out into the passage. It was deserted. Every stateroom door was closed. I took especial note of the three doors aft of O'Brian's. They were the cabins of Ferber, Cartright and Dutwiler, the three other men who, like myself, had purchased cheap passage from Cape Town to Savannah.

Later I censured myself for not tapping on those three doors to discover whether Ferber, Cartright and Dutwiler were in their bunks. They so asserted when called to the carpet by Captain Janes. At the moment I thought nothing of them whatever, and hurried forward to the saloon. It, too, was deserted. I ascended through the companion to the bridge. There I found Captain Janes, bawling orders.

"Mr. Anthony," he snapped at me, "the mate tells me it was you saw the man go over aport."

"I saw a bobbing head in the water," I told him.

"Go aft, please," he instructed tersely, probably more to get me off the bridge than anything else, "and lend an eye on the poop. Maybe you can see him again. If you do, sing out." He whirled to give brisk orders to the helmsman.

I went around the corner of the chariroom, to the open bridge deck, and saw a score of men busy at the davits. A boat was being lowered on either side. The ship was now not only stopped, but seemed to be reversed and making slow headway astern. I looked back. The sea was calm and, under the stars, looked like black oil—except for a few floating lights well astern. Life buoys, with lighted

flares attached, had been heaved over at the very first. I heard O'Brian shouting orders. I did not add to the confusion by accosting him, but passed on aft.

I descended by two successive ladders to the after-deck, so low that I could have reached over its scuppered rail and touched the water. I made my way on by its two battened hatches and ascended to the poop. There I found the second engineer, the purser and six men of the crew. They had been dispatched there to use their eyes in scanning the dark waters. I could not hear the dip of oars. The two boats could be dimly seen, by the stars and by the navigation lights, gliding astern to scout for the man in the sea.

The oarsmen were soon out of sight, though, so short was the range of illumination.

"A sorry chance of picking him up, if you ask me, Mr. Anthony." The speaker, at my elbow, was Second Engineer Dolan. I knew him, as he was one of twelve men who composed the saloon mess. These twelve were the captain, the three mates, the three engineers, the four passengers and the purser. The other thirty-three men aboard belonged to the forecastle, and I knew nothing about them. Dolan was a short and freckled Irishman under thirty years of age.

"You mean because we carry no searchlight," I suggested.

"That," he assented, "and because the man was shot. It's not likely he's still afloat."

"I heard the shot. But how do you know," I asked Dolan, "that the man who went overboard was hit?"

He explained to me that he, Dolan, being off watch, had rushed up to the bridge deck on hearing the shot. He found that the second mate, who had been making computations in the chart-room, had dashed around the corner of the chart-room to the open deck aft of it to investigate the shot. At the same time Captain Janes came rushing out of his cabin, at the extreme rear of the bridge deck. Immediately First Mate O'Brian joined them, O'Brian having dashed up from the saloon deck.

The four men, arriving at the spot near the port rail of the bridge deck, directly over O'Brian's stateroom, from which spot had come the shot and cry, found a pistol lying on the deck within a foot of the rail. Beside the pistol was a stain of blood, and another stain on the rail.

I whistled. It looked like murder. Certainly we would soon know the identity of the victim, whether or not we salvaged him from the sea. There was bound to be a missing man when we checked the ship's company. Who? And who had assaulted him for the diamond?

DOLAN as yet knew nothing about the diamond, which I still retained in my pocket. Time had been too valuable for O'Brian to make any report except to announce that a man was overboard. O'Brian, I judged, was now out in one of the boats. No one else but myself knew of the diamond. I put my hand in my pocket and rubbed it. It seemed to burn my palm.

All this while our group was bunched on the poop, scanning the waters astern. Offsetting the luck that it was a dead calm was the ill luck that we carried no searchlight.

"The Old Man would rather save a penny than a life," growled Dolan.

A snicker of assent came from the purser, who stood at my other elbow. The purser was a Cuban, by name Manuel Moreno. He was tall and thin, with long oblique eyes and sleek, perfumed hair. He spoke good English, but I'd sized him up as a nitwit because he was always snickering.

We were wasting our time as lookouts, I knew, for we couldn't even see the two boats. I heard two seamen of our group grumbling because we didn't have a searchlight. One of them used the phrase, "Pinchpenny Janes."

That I understood. I knew Captain Janes to be a grasping Yankee, always on the make. He owned a sixteenth of

the ship. He had cut all overhead to the bone. He carried neither searchlight nor wireless. Maritime law did not hold him to the regulations of a passenger ship, as a freighter which carries fewer than twelve passengers may avoid those regulations. I happened to know, too, that Janes was not reporting the four passengers he did carry, on this trip, in the records of the purser. That eighty pounds was to be just so much private rakeoff for Captain Janes.

Janes was a widower. During his wife's life she had sailed the seas with him; that was why his cabin was a two-stateroom suite. Except that he was a pinchpenny and a miser, and that a deep, narrow lidded scheming seemed to lurk habitually in his eyes, I liked Janes. I knew that he was a good seaman.

My mind strayed to the passengers: Ferber, Cartright and Dutwiler. Where were they now? More than likely one of these three was connected with the diamond. They looked like adventurers, and had taken ship at a diamond port.

Idling there on the poop deck, I formed a theory of the crime. It was that one of the trio had brought the stone aboard. A second of the trio knew he had it and had assaulted him tonight on the bridge deck. A scuffle! A shot! The wounded man, tenaciously holding the diamond in his left hand, had gone over the rail. Falling down the wall of the ship, he had snatched frantically for a handhold. Nothing but smooth steel and rivets, until his snatching right hand had clutched the sill of O'Brian's open porthole.

That would have been a slippery and precarious grip. To better it, in had gone the man's other arm to grasp some sharp corner, such as the rim of the circular window itself, which was hinged ajar, inward. But with his first grip slipping and the dark sea yawning at his feet, life would have instantly become more important to him than the diamond. Besides that, he was shot, bleeding.

Thus his left hand, snatching inward to grip the port pane, would have opened and dropped the diamond. Then the man's first grip had slipped; down he went into the sea.

I had no doubt that a roll call would discover either Ferber, Dutwiler or Cartright missing from the ship.

"Quite a bit of excitement, eh, Mr. Anthony?"

Startled, I turned and saw that the speaker was none other than Ferber. Ferber, at least, was *not* the man overboard.

He was a short, portly fellow with a double chin and watery eyes, a rubicund blond, talkative and boastful. He was just now in shirt sleeves and suspenders, wearing baggy white pants. All I knew of him was that he had shipped at Cape Town. I might have liked him a little if he hadn't been always telling stories you couldn't believe. Ferber himself was always the hero of these stories, and he lacked a good deal of fitting their parts.

"What's it all about?" he wheezed.

I told him of the shot and the cry, the pistol and the blood stain on the deck, omitting mention of the diamond.

"The devil of a note, what!" he exclaimed. "Who's missing?"

"We don't know yet." I was sizing him up, wondering whether his surprise wasn't overdone. "Didn't you hear the shot?" I asked sharply.

"Not a peep of it," he assured me. "I was asleep in my cabin. First racket I heard was when they lowered the boats. I dressed, came aft down the corridor and saw a bunch of you here on the poop. Man overboard, eh? Well, well."

Some distance astern of the ship I heard the dip of an oar. The boats were still scouting. A moment later I heard Captain Janes hail one of them from the bridge. The voice of the third mate shouted back that they had found nothing.

The ship held almost stationary, on a quiet sea. Another interval of waiting.

"Hello!" exclaimed Ferber. "Here comes Dutwiler."

The passenger, Dutwiler, joined us on the poop. Again I was startled, for I had figured that it was either Dutwiler or

Cartright who had been dumped in the sea.

Dutwiler did not greet us. He went to the extreme stern and stared moodily back into the sea. He wore duck trousers and a sweater. Dutwiler was by temperament sour, crabbed and uncommunicative. He was tall, as thin as the purser Moreno, had a long sunken face and harsh blue English eyes. You never saw him except at mess.

Minutes passed. Then, taking the last wind out of the sails of my theory, Cartright appeared on the poop deck.

Cartright greeted us, though grumpily. He had talked with the captain, he said, and knew everything the captain knew. He remarked that the captain was chafing because this stop would add perhaps twenty dollars to the cost of the voyage, in time and fuel. That brought an inane snicker from the Cuban, Moreno, who was still standing by.

Cartright then joined Dutwiler at the extreme stern and stared back into the night.

Well, I thought, Cartright wasn't the man overboard, although he might easily be the villain who had heaved some victim over the rail. I happened to know something about Cartright. More than once I had seen him around Kimberley. He had been pointed out to me as a confidence man, a card sharp, if not an out and out renegade.

The whisper in Kimberley was that Cartright had been in South Africa ten years, awaiting the expiration of the statute of limitations on some embezzlement crime abroad. By that theory such an interval had now expired, and Cartright was returning home.

Certainly Cartright might have come into illicit possession of a huge rough diamond. I amended my theory to read that he had been robbed of it by some member of the crew, and in the scuffle had toppled his assailant over the bridge deck rail.

With every passing moment hope of saving the lost man became more impossible. The flares had burned out on the drifting buoys. Again I heard an exchange of hails between the captain and the mates commanding the two boats.

Shortly the two boats drew alongside. The search was abandoned. The boats were hoisted to the davits. A few minutes later the *Good Hope* resumed her course at full steam ahead, and word passed around that all hands must report to the Old Man in the saloon.

All did report, except that a helmsman and one mate remained on the bridge, and an engineer and one helper remained in the engine room. Forty-one men, including the cabin boy, assembled, by squeezing, either into the saloon or into the passage leading thereto.

Heads were tallied. Not a man was missing. The total ship's company was forty-five. Forty-five we still were, hale and hearty aboard the freighter *Good Hope.*

"MR. ANTHONY," complained Captain Janes, turning sharply to me, "it can only mean that your blasted imagination was working overtime. You only thought you saw a head bobbing in the sea."

I maintained stoutly that I *had* seen a head bobbing in the sea, at the side of the ship.

Before Janes could retort, O'Brian clinched my testimony. O'Brian admitted that he himself had not put his head out of the porthole, and thus had not seen the man in the sea.

"But," he added, "I did see a stain of blood on the upper deck, alongside of a pistol whose one discharged shell was still warm. You, sir, also saw that evidence. Therefore some one was shot and wounded. Who? We all seem sound and hearty. If there is no wounded man aboard, then that wounded man went into the sea."

The captain's brusk incredulity had nettled me, so I was glad to see O'Brian bowl him over. O'Brian's logic was unassailable. Human blood had been shed; therefore if every man aboard was with-

out wound or scratch then some human being had been lost at sea.

"As further proof," I added to Captain Janes, "that a man slithered down the outside of the ship past the mate's porthole, I offer this."

Whereupon I stepped up and placed on the saloon table, in front of the captain, the gigantic diamond.

There it lay under a cluster of lights. Every breath in the room was drawn. Men stared. Utter amazement confounded the entire company except O'Brian and myself. No one was more astounded than Captain Janes. O'Brian, having himself commanded one of the rescue boats, had had no opportunity thus far to report the diamond.

He now related the circumstance of the blue clad arm which had dropped it in at the porthole.

Janes asked sharp questions. His eyes began darting accusingly about the saloon, from man to man of us. Later Janes rebuked me for having exposed the stone to such public view. He told me that I should have kept the diamond a secret from every one except himself and the mate. In this he was right. I had displayed it impetuously, in defense of my own testimony about the head bobbing in the sea.

It was too late now. All eyes had seen the diamond.

An awkward silence was broken by O'Brian.

"I suggest, sir, that all hands, without exception and without regard to rank, be examined for some minor scratch or flesh wound. If no wound exists, that will be final proof that some bleeding victim was lost at sea."

Janes agreed. He said that as a matter of form the examinations would begin at the top, at the highest ranks, and step down. He carefully pouched the diamond. He then stepped into the mate's cabin with the mate. The mate examined the captain and the captain examined the mate. This was mere formality and, of course, no wound was found. Other officers were then paired in the same way. The mate searched the four passengers. Chief Engineer Nuerder was assigned to examine the engine crew. Third Mate Ord, having been examined himself, herded all seamen to the forecastle to be searched for scratch or wound. No one, cook, steward or cabin boy, escaped the examination.

Finally Captain Janes, O'Brian, Ferber, Dutwiler, Cartright, the Cuban purser and myself, assembled in the saloon to await the report from Ord. We all stood except Janes, who seated himself at the end of the mess table, like a judge on the bench. Janes was tall and lithe, about fifty years old, clean shaven, thin lipped. One could see that his suspicions were centering upon the three passengers, Ferber, Dutwiler and Cartright.

He got their statements. Only Ferber denied having heard the shot. Cartright and Dutwiler claimed to have been half asleep and fully undressed in their bunks. On hearing the shot, they had dressed and gone aft, they said, joining a group on the poop.

Janes told me to act as clerk and take written note of the testimony. I did. Janes gave his own testimony quickly, precisely. He had been reading in his cabin. He had heard the shot, but had mistaken it for some minor explosion in the engine room. A moment later he had heard the cry, "Man overboard!" and dashed out to join O'Brian, Dolan and the bridge officer at the stain of blood.

EIGHT bells sounded; midnight. The watch changed, Third Mate Ord relieving Deeming, the Second. This gave us a chance to examine Deeming and his helmsman. Neither had any scratch or wound. Deeming came in for sharp censure in not responding to the shot with more speed. He was a lazy, somewhat slow witted chap of thirty. He claimed to have been making computations in the chart-room when the shot was fired. More likely he had been nodding at his watch, half asleep on this calm night like a man under the spell of a dull sermon

in church. O'Brian told me later that Deeming had more than once been caught dozing on his watch. In any case the back wall of the chart-room would have screened the scuffle from Deeming. As for the helmsman, he could not have left his wheel had there been a pitched battle on the deck behind him.

Deeming was sent to the forecastle to finish the job begun by Ord.

"As for this blasted diamond," the captain said to us, "I'll turn it over to authorities at the port of call."

"Do you want me to keep it in the purser's safe, sir?" mewed the purser, Moreno. He stood there sweating, slicking back his oily hair.

Janes pondered the suggestion. Finally he turned to me and asked my opinion, as a mining engineer, on the value of the stone. I mentioned the sum of thirty-five thousand pounds, or double that if skilfully cut and polished. Janes whistled. He took the huge diamond from his pocket and rubbed it on the white, gold braided sleeve of his uniform. I saw the fat, double chinned passenger, Ferber, staring at it avidly. I saw the long, lean fingers of Moreno twitch, and his black eyes flash narrowly. Cartright wore only a cynical smile. Dutwiler yawned, looked at his watch as though impatient to be excused.

"I'm responsible for the stone," Janes told the purser bruskly. "I'll take care of it myself." He seemed to have read the Cuban's expression of greed.

Janes himself, I thought, looked rather greedily upon the diamond. But then, the penny squeezing captain would have looked at a silver dollar in almost the same manner. It was said of him that he still had the first nickel he had ever earned. Money was his god. I knew that by the avidity with which he played auction bridge, at a cent a point, and by the acumen with which he had sold me tobacco from his chest.

Deeming came in and announced that no man in the forecastle had wound or scratch. That was the final report, and gave every man on the ship a clean bill of health.

"It means," Captain Janes said to O'Brian, "that the man who went overboard was a stowaway."

O'Brian made no response, but the rest of us nodded assent. Since we still had forty-five sound men aboard, who could the lost man be other than an unknown stowaway?

"As to the assailant who heaved the stowaway overboard," resumed Captain Janes, "we'll leave the solution of that to Mr. O'Brian." He smiled grimly. "Our mate, gentlemen," he explained, "once stood a three-year watch on the New York police, so I understand. Let us hope that his time was not wasted and that he learned something about criminal detection."

O'Brian bowed gravely in acceptance of the commission.

Moreno snickered fatuously. Janes glowered at him. Ferber saw the rebuke and thus cut short the wisecrack which hovered in his own puffy lips. Dutwiler murmured a complaint about losing "so damned much sleep." Cartright, the confidence man, kept an easy poise, although I now noticed that he was the most disheveled of the lot.

Janes asked me for the notes I had taken of the various alibis. I handed them over. The captain put them in the pocket of his white, gold braided coat (he was always spruce and used a formal uniform with a tightly fitting military collar) and remarked that he would personally enter the notes in the ship's log. He then bade us good night.

We waited until he had ascended the ladder to the bridge. Ferber, Cartright, Dutwiler and Moreno then went back to their staterooms, while I lingered in the saloon with O'Brian. I was keen to mull the situation over with the mate and to inform him that I knew Cartright to be a renegade.

"Quite likely Ferber and Dutwiler are birds of the same feather," he said dryly. "First, Mr. Anthony, what do you think of the stowaway idea?"

"Certainly he was a stowaway," I exclaimed.

"No," he contested, "there might never have been a stowaway. The blighter might have fallen into the sea and then reboarded the ship."

"How?"

"The after-deck scuppers are barely above water line," he reminded. "Those low scuppers, or the rail itself, or even the log line of dead reckoning which trails aport, offer three possibilities for a drowning man to get a handhold. He might have pulled himself aboard."

"But the blood stain," I objected. "No man among us had shed blood."

"That seems to upset me," admitted O'Brian. "Frankly I'm stumped about the blood stain. On the other score, it's hard for me to accept the theory of a stowaway. We're two days out of port. Unless our man stowed away among bales of cargo in the holds, where did he stow away? And if in the holds, who fed him? If there was no stowaway, then the head you saw bobbing in the sea was the head of one of the forty-five known men on the ship."

"In which case he must have climbed back on board!"

"Exactly. Now let us sift that end of it," resumed the big mate. "Suppose he dragged himself, wet and cold, on to the after-deck. At that instant I was running up the ladder from saloon to bridge, sounding the cry, 'Man overboard!' Nearly all hands were in the focsle. Deeming was in the chart-room; his helmsman was in the wheel-house; the engine watch was below; passengers, so they claim, were in their saloon deck cabins. And on this calm night there was no watch aloft or aft. Decks were fairly dark.

"Immediately after that instant a score of men rushed toward the bridge-house to lower boats. There was a deal of confusion. Our wet man could easily have made the midship superstructure in the gloom, as one of the group concentrating there, either from curiosity or to lend a hand. In the confusion he could have made his own quarters and changed clothes."

"Yes," I agreed, "and he could have chucked his wet clothes into the sea."

"Aye," assented the mate wryly. "That's the trouble with clues at sea. All a man needs to do to erase a clue is to heave it overboard. Once our man was in dry clothes, he could have joined any group on the ship, the men on the poop or the men at the davits."

"Except that he was, or had been, shedding blood!" I persisted.

"Aye, the red stain on the upper deck contradicts every theory except that a stowaway was lost at sea. But hang it, Mr. Anthony, I can't quite believe in a stowaway."

I mentioned that Ferber, Dutwiler and Cartright had been very slow in making an appearance after the cry had been raised.

"All three will bear watching," he agreed. "As for us, we're in the position of trying to solve a crime which we can't even classify. We can't call it robbery, since the diamond has been recovered and delivered to the captain. We can't call it murder, since we don't know any one was drowned. We can't even say whether the man who dropped the diamond in at my porthole was the man who originally brought the stone aboard, or a man who an instant earlier had snatched it from another."

Below us the engines were thrumming; we were pounding ahead at full speed. Two bells sounded—one o'clock in the morning. We were now many leagues onward from the spot where I had seen the bobbing head in the sea.

O'Brian and I remained in the saloon for another ten minutes, tackling every angle of the mystery. Directly above us were the bridge and chart-room, and occasionally we could hear the tramp of Third Mate Ord as he paced his watch on the bridge. Too bad that Deeming, at four bells, hadn't been walking his watch with like vigilance. If so he would probably have reached the scene of the scuffle, back of the chart-room, in time to see the assailant making his escape.

I suggested that this escape must have been down one of the aft companions,

since O'Brian had immediately rushed up the forward ladder to the bridge.

"No," corrected O'Brian, "the assailant might have stood pat. That is, he could have stepped into the shadow between the funnels, in the center of the bridge deck. In a few minutes there were a score of us at the davits; our assailant could have joined the group of us, as though summoned either by curiosity or duty. You understand that our imperative job at the moment was not to look for the man aboard, but to look for the man in the sea."

"Mr. O'Brian! Mr. O'Brian!"

We heard the mate's name shrieked shrilly, twice, from the bridge directly over us. The hails came in the excited voice of Ord, the third mate.

HARDLY had the echo died when O'Brian was dashing up through the companion to the bridge. I was in his wake. Ord's hail had been more than urgent; it had held a note of panic.

When we reached the bridge we did not see Ord. We looked quickly into the chart-room. It was empty except for Willie Peel. Willie Peel was the thirteen-year-old cabin boy, who should have been asleep in the galley.

There was a helmsman in the wheelhouse, of course. He was gripping the wheel, perforce looking forward and down into the binnacle.

"Mr. Ord wants you at the Old Man's cabin, Mr. O'Brian," the helmsman shouted out at us. "I think the Old Man's been done in."

We raced around the corner of the chart-room to the open deck behind it. Past the funnels, we saw the captain's cabin. Ord stood there, banging at the door.

"It's locked," bawled Ord to O'Brian.

We reached it. It was a cabin of two small rooms, *en suite*, the unused room having been occupied in her lifetime by the captain's wife. It was the forward room and its porthole was both closed and dark. The other porthole showed light from within. Moreover, it was open. O'Brian took one look through it, then sprang to assist Ord in crashing the door.

There was a narrow aisle of deck between the door and the starboard rail, so narrow that Ord and O'Brian had no chance for long lunges in their efforts to crash the door. While they battered on it, I peered through the open, lighted porthole, seeing the thing which Ord and O'Brian had already observed.

I saw Captain Janes stretched on the floor, face down, his head bleeding. He was fully dressed in his white, braided uniform, with its tight fitting military collar, just as we had last seen him an hour ago. He was motionless, apparently dead. Beyond him I could see a small steel safe, the door swinging wide open.

Crash! The stateroom portal gave way under the mighty assaults of O'Brian. He plunged in like an ox, Ord and I in his wake.

There lay Janes, his head in a small pool of blood—but he was not dead. He now moved slightly and we heard him groan.

On the floor near him lay a pearl handled revolver. It could not have been fired, because no one had heard a shot. It was not the revolver found at four bells near the port rail of the open bridge deck, because O'Brian had kept that one in his pocket all this intervening while. Nor was it the captain's own pistol, because the weapons of all the ship's officers were automatics.

O'Brian was bending over Janes with a wet cloth. Again I heard the captain groan. Ord was reaching to pick up the pearl handled revolver when O'Brian ordered him sharply to let it lie, in case there was a fingerprint on it. He told Ord to summon Chief Engineer Nuerder, through the tube from bridge to engine room.

Ord stepped out. O'Brian had rolled Janes over on his back. Janes opened his eyes. He was pale. There was a red gash just over his temple. His fists had been clenched. I saw him bring them up, open them and stare at his empty palms.

"Who was it, sir?" urged O'Brian.

Janes pointed feebly to an inner door, which was ajar, leading to the other cabin of the suite.

"He stepped in from there," whispered Janes huskily, "and bashed me on the head. He made off with the diamond."

Nuerder arrived with Ord. It developed that we carried no ship's doctor, because of the same economy which caused us to carry neither wireless nor searchlight. But the Swede engineer Nuerder was known to have skill at rude surgery. He attended to Janes. He reported that the captain had been struck twice on the head with some blunt instrument, possibly the barrel of a gun.

The mate searched Janes, to make certain the diamond was gone and to learn whether the thief had taken other loot, such as the captain's watch or wallet. The watch and wallet were intact, but the diamond was gone.

The safe door was wide open. It was a tiny private safe, where the captain kept such personal funds and papers as he did not wish to entrust to the purser.

Our first thought was that the assailant had looted the safe. An examination proved, however, that it had not been touched. There was petty change in it; we also found eighty pounds in gold coin. I recalled that the captain had charged me twenty pounds for my passage, which I had paid in gold. Quite likely Ferber, Cartright and Dutwiler had done the same, which would account for the eighty pounds in gold.

Janes was now resting on his bunk. Ord told us that he had been summoned by the cabin boy, who had appeared miraculously on the bridge at shortly after two bells. We left Nuerder attending Janes, and repaired to the chart-room to get the cabin boy's story.

First, Ord told his own. Ord was a lifelong sailor, sixty-five years old, weazened, a midget in stature. He was uneducated, recently promoted; in fact this was his first voyage out of the forecastle. He told us that Captain Janes, upon leaving us in the saloon, had ascended to the bridge. There he remarked to Ord that while all the testimony was fresh in his mind, he, Janes, would copy it into the ship's log.

The log book was in the chart-room. Janes entered the chart-room, sat down, and was nearly an hour writing in the log book. All this while Ord had paced the bridge, just in front of the chart-room and just back of the helmsman. At two bells Janes completed his record. He stepped out on the bridge and suggested that Ord look the log entries over. If Ord could think of anything which had been omitted he was to speak to the captain about it in the morning.

Whereupon the captain had passed around the corner of the chart-room aft toward his cabin. Ord entered the chart-room to peruse the log. Ord found that the captain's notations had gone into the most minute details concerning the diamond and the man overboard. While Ord sat there at the chart-room table reading these entries, he was astounded by the appearance of Willie Peel, the cabin boy . . .

We now entered the chart-room to interrogate Willie Peel.

The boy was only half dressed, and barefoot.

"I was in my bunk off the galley," he told us, "when the captain's buzzer ringed right in my ears."

"What?" cried O'Brian. "You say the captain buzzed for you at two bells in the morning?"

O'Brian then turned to me and explained about the buzzer. The captain occasionally took his meals in his cabin; often he took a cup of coffee between meals. For the alertness of this service there was a buzzer connecting with the galley.

"It was the first time 'e 'ad ever rung for me that late," testified Willie. "But I thought, account of all the row tonight, 'e might need a cup of coffee. I went up, by the aft starboard companion, to find out. The Old Man's door, I mean the captain's door, sir, was locked. But 'is porthole was open and 'is room was lit. I looked in. I could 'ardly see him. I 'ad to stand on tiptoes before I could see 'im on the floor.

"There 'e lay, sir, on 'is face, blood comin' from 'is head. His safe was open. I run quick as I could to the bridge to tell the watch. I seen the watch officer inside the chart-room, reading the log. 'Come quick; there's 'ell to pay, sir,' says I. 'Wot's up?' says 'e. 'The captain buzzed for me,' says I, 'and when I got there—' "

Ord spoke up in his own defense.

"The blasted kid was blubbering," he told O'Brian. "He was as white as a windjammer in full sheet and I had to shake him. That's how come it took me maybe three minutes to get his story. When I got it, I sang out for you and dashed aft to the Old Man's cabin."

O'Brian told Ord to remain at his post. We went back to see how Nuerder was getting along with Janes. Janes was resting easily and assured us that he was only scratched. He breathed deeply with relief when we told him that the contents of his pockets and private safe were intact.

He told O'Brian that he had put in nearly an hour writing the first crime into the log, going into detail for two reasons: first, to aid port authorities in solving the diamond mystery; second, to make it clear that every reasonable effort had been exhausted to rescue the man who had gone overboard into the sea.

Janes had then repaired to his cabin. Its door stood open, but he had naturally so left it at four bells upon dashing out in response to the shot. This was the first time he had returned.

He entered, closed the door, which automatically locked upon closing by virtue of a spring latch on the inside. He immediately stooped over his safe, opened it for the purpose of stowing away the diamond.

Just then a man stepped out of the other cabin of the suite, the one used years ago by his wife, and cracked Janes on the head. Janes had not seen his face, but he had heard the step behind him an instant before the blow fell. In a flash he had sought to summon help. Near his hand was a row of buzzers, one to the mate's room, one to the engine room, one to the purser's office, one to the galley.

Janes had dived toward this row of buzzers and wasn't sure which one he had pressed. At that instant he was whacked on the head. Next he knew we were all bending over him and the diamond was gone.

THE pearl handled pistol was still lying on the floor, untouched. O'Brian picked it up carefully by the tip of the barrel and examined it under the light. It had not been fired, though fully loaded. It was a .38 six-shooter. The other gun, the one found at four bells on the bridge deck, had likewise been a .38, but with a black bone handle.

"This time I get a break," O'Brian said with a pleased smile. "There is a first class thumbprint on the pearl handle of this gun. There wasn't any at all on the other. We can't find out who touched that one last, but we can find out who touched this one last. I'll get thumbprints from all hands aboard."

He took the bone handled gun from his pocket and placed it, for safe keeping, in the captain's safe. He was about to place the pearl handled one beside it when he decided that he had better not let the thumbprint out of his possession until it was photographed. Accordingly he borrowed a cigar box from the captain, very carefully put the pearl handled gun in it, thumbprint up, and retained the box under his arm.

He locked the safe on the bone handled gun.

Nuerder had bandaged the captain's head.

"I'm all right," Janes told him. "A sailor gets used to hard knocks." He dismissed Nuerder.

That left only Janes, O'Brian and myself in the cabin.

"What do you think of it now?" inquired Janes wryly of the mate.

"I think, sir, we'll have the scoundrel by the heels in sharp order. You see, of course, what happened. All hands saw you take charge of the diamond. All hands heard Mr. Anthony's opinion that

it was worth a prince's ransom. Some one decided to steal it. When we dispersed, the thief stole up to the bridge deck by one of the aft companions. You ascended by the forward ladder and spent an hour writing in the log. That gave the thief his chance."

"Aye," agreed Janes. "My cabin door was open. He crept in and waited in there." Janes thumbed toward the interior door.

O'Brian now stepped into that second room, to investigate the slim possibility that the thief might still be there. He rejoined us, reporting that it was empty.

"Naturally it would be. The thief lurked there all the hour during which the captain wrote in the log. Probably his idea was merely to spy out where the captain secreted the diamond, then wait for the captain to go to sleep. Then he could take the stone and make away without violence. But when he saw the diamond was going to be locked in a safe, he knew he couldn't crack the safe without waking the captain. So he stepped out and struck, on the spot."

"Naturally he didn't shoot," I suggested, "since a shot would have been heard by Ord in the chart-room."

"Aye," agreed the mate. "And as the captain went down, we can picture the fellow snatching for the diamond with one hand and with the other hand trying to prevent the captain from thumbing a buzzer. Doing so, he dropped his gun. In his funk to get away he neglected to retrieve the gun and hurl it overboard. He knew some one would respond to the buzzer."

We agreed that retreat must have been by one of the aft companions; otherwise the man would have risked Ord in the chart-room. O'Brian remarked that it should be quite simple to identify the owner of the pearl handled gun.

Just then we heard footsteps approaching across the bridge deck. The tall figure of Dutwiler appeared in the doorway.

Dutwiler wore a bathrobe over pajamas. Beneath the skirt of this robe I saw that his shoes were unlaced and that he was without socks. His long, narrow face was as dour as usual.

"What seems to be the trouble?" he inquired grumpily of O'Brian.

"What made *you* think there was trouble?" countered the mate.

"I heard a lot of running about, and excited voices." Dutwiler was now staring at the bandages on the captain's head. "Anything I can do to help?" he offered.

It occurred to me that Dutwiler might really have come up to find out whether or not Janes was past help. Naturally the recent assailant did not know whether or not he had killed Janes. Or he might be on edge to know whether Janes could give information which would identify the crook. I watched Dutwiler like a hawk. His expression told me absolutely nothing.

"You might help," suggested O'Brian coldly, "by stating whether or not you own a pearl handled .38 pistol."

"I certainly do not. Why?"

"Some one clubbed Captain Janes senseless with such a gun, and stole the diamond."

Dutwiler blinked.

"Have you searched the crew?" he inquired vacuously.

"Haven't had time," O'Brian told him. "But we may be sure the thief isn't fool enough to keep the loot on his person, or in his quarters, or in any concealment which would suggest his own guilt. Unless he threw it overboard, it's on the ship and we'll find it."

"What's up? Ah—*por Dios!*"

The exclamation came from the lynx-eyed purser, Moreno, who appeared fully dressed in our midst. He stood in the portal gaping at the captain's bandaged head.

THE MATE questioned him. Moreno claimed that he had been checking over accounts, which explained why he was fully dressed at this late hour. His explainings seemed to me overdone in detail, and he was in the midst of them when we were suddenly joined by Cartright.

Cartright was dressed exactly as we had last seen him in the saloon. That is he was without coat and wore blue serge trousers and a white shirt. What made me intensely alert was that the shirt was now conspicuously soiled. There were black smudges on it and another black smudge on the tip of Cartright's nose. It was as though he had stood tightly against and facing some sooty wall.

After all, Cartright was the one man aboard with a known shady reputation. He saw me staring at the smudge on the tip of his nose. Quick as a flash he pulled out a handkerchief and rubbed it off.

His shirt, however, was still smudged. I might have thought he had slid along a dirty deck on his chest and nose, except that the *Good Hope's* decks were never dirty. They were swabbed every day. Where on this shipshape ship could a man so soil his shirt and nose, unless he had been prowling in some such out of the way corner as, for instance, one of the cargo holds?

My suspicions of Cartright became more acute than ever. If Cartright had stolen the diamond, certainly he would have had to hide it immediately in some cache which would not point to his own guilt, if found.

Meanwhile O'Brian was questioning him. Cartright professed ignorance of any pearl handled pistol.

O'Brian then summoned Willie Peel from the chart-room.

"Willie," the mate inquired, "your duties include the tidying up of the passengers' staterooms, do they not?"

"Yes, sir. I've tidied up the cabins each morning, sir."

"Doing so, did you ever see this?" O'Brian opened his cigar box and showed the pearl handled .38 pistol to the cabin boy.

The boy looked at it, then nodded vigorously in the affirmative.

"Why, yes, sir. It belongs to Mr. Ferber, sir. 'E sleeps with it under 'is pillow; I've seen it the larst two mornings when I've made 'is bunk."

Ferber! Least of all would I have suspected the talkative, double chinned Ferber. Yet here he was definitely identified as the owner of the gun.

At that instant Ferber himself appeared at the doorway of the captain's cabin. He was out of breath, in bare feet, and wore only pajamas.

"I went to sleep an hour ago," he told us. "I'd locked my door; in fact I mean to keep it locked, now that I know there's been skullduggery aboard."

All this while he was staring at the open cigar box, exposing the gun, which was held by O'Brian. Ferber had launched into his alibi, I later remembered, without even being asked for it. His words continued in a rush:

"I woke up three minutes ago; in fact my nerves have been all shot since four bells, and I'd slept restlessly. I couldn't get my mind off that dirty work at four bells. So when I woke up three minutes ago I decided to make sure the pistol, which I always keep under my pillow, was loaded. I reached for it and, dammit, it was gone!"

Ferber was pale and seemed genuinely frightened. He now pointed to the cigar box held by O'Brian.

"Why, there it is!" he cried. "Where did you find it?" His eyes shifted to Captain Janes, who was sitting on his bunk with his head bandaged.

"When had you last seen the pistol?" inquired O'Brian.

Ferber assured us that the pistol had been under his pillow, safe enough, at four bells, at the instant of the shot on the bridge deck. He knew this because he had been on the point of taking it with him when he went out to see what was going on. On a moment's reflection he had thought it wouldn't look well for him to go dashing around the decks with a gun in his hand, right after that shot. So he had gone out unarmed.

It was midnight when he returned to his room and locked the door. He retired without looking under his pillow to see if the gun was there.

"Certainly the gun was swiped from my

room," he said, "between ten o'clock and midnight."

"Naturally you'd claim it was swiped," jeered Cartright.

"If it was," said O'Brian, "there's a thumbprint on the butt plate that will tell who took it. In no case is there any chance for the crook to get away with either his rough stuff or the diamond. It's not as if we were on land, where a man would have an entire continent to hide himself and his loot. A four hundred and forty foot bottom by a fifty-three foot beam—that's as far as our man can range."

"Maybe he didn't range half an inch," suggested Dutwiler in a tone of impudence, his eyes on the captain. "Maybe this assault was faked. Maybe there never was any intruder in the captain's cabin."

Before Janes could retort, O'Brian himself nipped this theory in the bud.

"The presence of Ferber's gun," he assured us, "fixes the fact of an intruder. Ferber either lies to us or he tells us the truth. If he lies to us, we must conclude that he is guilty himself. If he tells us the truth, we must know that the gun was stolen from his room between four and eight bells.

"Now it just happens that Captain Janes could not have stolen that gun between ten and twelve o'clock. Why? Because there was never an instant of those two hours when he wasn't in the company of other officers of the ship.

"At the first shot, at four bells, he rushed out and joined Deeming. Ord and Nuerder appeared. These officers remained in a group until the lifeboats returned to the ship. In company they went down to the saloon to hold court. The captain was there, presiding, until eight bells. For no instant between four and eight bells was he alone."

The captain did not rebuke Cartright for insinuating his own guilt. Instead:

"In fact, Mr. Cartright has as much right to suspect me as I have to suspect Mr. Cartright. Get to the bottom of this, Mr. O'Brian, without respect to rank. Just now my head is throbbing and I want to rest. Send these passengers down to the saloon, and get full statements from them. In the morning give me a full report."

"Gentlemen, please wait for me in the saloon," directed O'Brian.

Cartright, Ferber, Dutwiler and Moreno filed out. O'Brian lingered for a word with Captain Janes.

"We'll not find the diamond in the thief's stateroom," he said. "Our only real clue is the thumbprint on the gun's butt plate. First thing in the morning I'll get fingerprints from all hands."

"Good. I hope you haven't forgotten what you learned on the New York police force," said Janes with a smile. "Good night."

O'Brian and I left for the saloon. The mate held the cigar box gingerly horizontal as he went down. He told me we mustn't let the gun out of our possession until the thumbprint was photographed.

Awaiting us in the saloon were Moreno and Dutwiler. O'Brian inquired sharply for Ferber and Cartright.

Just then Ferber appeared, through the passage leading from the row of port staterooms. He wore an overcoat over his pajamas.

"Since I've got to sit up all night being quizzed," he explained, "I wanted an outer garment."

A moment later Cartright appeared. He now wore an old sweater—the kind that slips over the head. He gave the same excuse as Ferber for stopping at his cabin *en route* to the saloon.

"Do you want *me* to hang around?" inquired Moreno fawningly of O'Brian.

"By all means," the mate told him curtly. "You will all stand by while I search a few pockets and a few cabins."

"If you find that stone in *my* pockets or *my* cabin," chirped Ferber indignantly, "then somebody planted it."

"Not a chance in a million I'll find it on you or on any one else," admitted the mate. "Still, you've got to be searched."

Dutwiler wore nothing except a bath robe over pajamas. He peeled off the robe and tossed it to O'Brian.

"Search that and be damned," he challenged. He turned the pockets of his pajamas inside out.

O'Brian gravely searched them all. He found no diamond. He then handed me the cigar box to take care of in his absence, told us all to wait in the saloon and went back to search cabins.

We sat there for an hour. No one spoke except Ferber. Ferber began to complain because we didn't have a competent detective aboard. It was all nonsense, he said, to expect the lubberly mate of a tramp freighter, at sea, to solve an intricate crime. Ferber then launched into the account of a diamond robbery in Cape Town years ago, an enigma which had baffled the police until Ferber himself had lent them a hand.

His boasting got on my nerves. Dutwiler sneered. Moreno snickered asininely, though fidgeting uneasily all the while. Cartright kept a poker face.

FINALLY O'Brian returned to us. To my surprise he brought with him a roll of crumpled clothing. He spread these on the table and they proved to be a gray flannel shirt, a blue serge coat, gray trousers and a one-piece union suit.

I touched the garments. They were wet. Then I saw a red stain on the left sleeve of the flannel shirt, between wrist and elbow.

"These," announced O'Brian, "I found under the bunk in your cabin, Mr. Ferber. Are you able to explain them?"

Ferber stared at the garments. He went white. The folds of his double chin quivered.

"They're not mine," he bleated. He licked his lips and then looked wildly around the room. "If you found them under my bunk, they were planted," he finished in shrill hysteria.

"That is more than possible," admitted O'Brian. "If you had worn them, I can't believe you'd be incautious enough to leave them in your cabin. Mr. Anthony, would you care to identify the sleeve of this blue serge coat?"

I could not positively identify it, but I had small doubt it was the same sleeve which had reached through the porthole and dropped the diamond into the mate's cabin. The wearer of that sleeve had an instant later dropped into the sea, naturally soaking his garments.

"The soaking was in sea water," said O'Brian. "I feel sure now that the man, scraping alongside as the ship glided by him, caught a handhold on the flush after-deck. He reboarded. His first thought would be to get rid of the wet clothes. He might have tossed them under Ferber's bunk, Ferber having just gone to the poop. The man might have then noticed that Ferber's pillow was askew, exposing a pearl handled pistol. Our man could have easily taken this pistol, using it later in an assault on the captain."

"Yes, yes, it couldn't have been any other way," chirped Ferber.

"I wonder," worried O'Brian, "what the man did with his wet shoes and socks. I found no wet shoes and socks in Ferber's cabin, or in any other cabin."

The mate went in turn to Ferber, Moreno, Dutwiler and Cartright, feeling their footwear to discover if they had been wet that night. He admitted that they had not. A wet shoe or sock would not have entirely dried since four bells.

Ferber asserted that it was ridiculous to say the wet clothing was his own.

"I'm too short for those long pants," he cried. "They wouldn't fit."

True, the garments seemed fit only for a tall man, such as Cartright, Moreno or Dutwiler. More and more it looked like a frame on Ferber.

O'Brian now began looking over the garments for some mark of identification. He found no laundry mark. He began sifting through the pockets. He found a pencil, a knife and a few small coins. Nothing else except a square of yellow paper.

The mate smoothed out the crumpled wet paper, and saw that it was a typed telegram or radiogram. Or rather, it seemed like the copy of a telegram, since

there was no official heading or operator's initial.

We all bent over the paper. O'Brian read from it:

"ALL SHIPMASTERS OUT OF CAPE TOWN SINCE 28TH:
LOOK OUT FOR 150 CARAT DIAMOND, STOLEN; THIEF THOUGHT TO HAVE SHIPPED FROM CAPE TOWN, 28TH.
—CAPTAIN OF THE PORT, CAPE TOWN"

O'Brian whistled.

"Now where does that let us off?" he exclaimed. "We drew anchor at Cape Town on the 28th. But we have no wireless aboard, and therefore the message could not have been received at sea by this ship. How do you explain it, Mr. Anthony?"

I was stumped. We were all stumped, unless it was that one guilty man among us who had worn the wet clothes.

"I take it you found nothing incriminating in *my* room, O'Brian," growled Cartright. "No diamonds? No pistols? No wet pants?"

"I found nothing incriminating in your cabin, Mr. Cartright," admitted the mate. "At the same time I'm frankly suspicious that you stole the diamond."

"What?" Cartright turned savagely to the mate, and I could see his eyes were bloodshot. "What the hell do you think you got on me, anyway?"

"It's simply that you went prowling about the ship, in some out of the way quarters, right after the assault on Captain Janes. The inference is that you were caching the loot."

"You're a cock eyed liar and can go straight to—"

Before Cartright could complete the insult O'Brian reached out and seized the man by the neck. He jerked Cartright violently to him, then with a mighty shove sent him sprawling across the saloon. Yet no hint of ire flashed in the mate's eyes as he gave this sudden gesture of discipline. His voice was normally mild as he spoke:

"Mr. Cartright, keep a civil tongue in your head. If not, I'll box you up in irons. We're at sea. The captain is the only magistrate aboard and I'm his chief of police. No more back talk, from you or any one else."

Cartright arose, livid. He was muttering, but too discreet to voice his imprecations aloud. Ferber was now fawning on O'Brian.

"You're quite right, Mr. O'Brian. And let me help you. I'm pretty good at this sort of——"

"I was saying," interrupted O'Brian coldly, "that Mr. Cartright went prowling around some odd corner of the ship right after the diamond was stolen. Why? Because when he appeared there was a black smudge on the tip of his nose, and other black smudges on the breast of his white shirt. Where did he get them? Mr. Cartright, take off that sweater. Then strip off your shirt and leave it with me."

Cartright stood at bay, glaring at the mate.

"No doubt," went on O'Brian, "you put the sweater on just now to conceal the smudges on your shirt. You rubbed the smudge off your nose when you saw Mr. Anthony staring at it. You realized that the character of the smudges might inform us as to just what part of the ship they came from. Look alive. Take off your shirt."

Cartright sullenly removed both his sweater and his shirt. O'Brian took possession of the shirt. He then excused Cartright, Moreno, Ferber and Dutwiler. This quartet withdrew and left me alone with O'Brian.

WE IMMEDIATELY examined the shirt. It was daubed with black smudges. Their character at first baffled us. When we rubbed them, they smeared and stained our fingers black.

"That's queer," puzzled O'Brian. "We saw Cartright erase the smudge from his nose with a single swipe. Yet these on the shirt are the kind that smear. They

seem more like black paint, fresh and sticky."

I had smudged my thumb from one of the black stains on the shirt. I tried to rub the stain off with my handkerchief, but couldn't. It only smeared, and spread. How had Cartright so easily rubbed a similar stain from the tip of his nose?"

"I have it!" exclaimed O'Brian, banging a huge fist into his palm. "It's not the same shirt." O'Brian put the smudged shirt to his nose and sniffed. He made me do the same and the smell was familiar.

"Shoe polish," announced the mate with conviction. "When I searched Cartright's cabin just now, I noticed a tin of shoe polish. I handled all his extra clothing and there was no other smudged shirt. Here's what happened: Cartright saw you staring at his nose and shirt up in the captain's cabin. He thus realized he was smudged. Maybe he looked into the captain's mirror. He rubbed a smudge, not a shoe polish smudge, off his nose. Then we sent our men down to the saloon.

"We delayed a moment before following. Ferber stopped by his room and put a coat over his pajamas. Cartright pretended to do the same. Actually Cartright changed shirts, chucking the first one out his porthole. He knew we'd seen smudges on a shirt, so he made smudges on the second shirt with a few quick daubs of shoe polish, put on a sweater and came to the saloon."

"Thus losing us the smudge clue!" I deplored.

"Aye. But it proves that the smudge was a clue, by the very fact that he got rid of it."

"How about Ferber?"

"It looks like he was crudely framed twice," offered O'Brian. "Once with the gun and once with the wet, blood stained clothes."

"Dutwiler?"

"Dutwiler looks capable of crime," admitted the mate, "but so far we've not a thing on him. As for Cartright, we would have a fair theoretical case against him except for the fact we find no wound on anybody's left forearm."

"It might not have been blood," I offered desperately. "All is not blood that's red."

"Right," he admitted, "and we got no chemist aboard to prove it's blood. Let's omit the blood stain and patch up a case. We'll say Cartright and Dutwiler were the pair who scuffled on the upper deck for the diamond. After a shot, Cartright was knocked over the rail, his hand squeezing the diamond. In a momentary clutch on my port sill, he dropped it within my cabin. On down he went into the sea. He reboarded on the after-deck.

"He made his stateroom and changed clothes. His next thought was to recover the diamond. Naturally he wasn't sure which porthole he had dropped it through. It wasn't on his own floor. He tried Ferber's. It wasn't there; but Ferber's pillow was askew and he saw the pearl handled gun. Next to his loot a crook always wants a gun, and by our theory Cartright had lost his own in the first scuffle. So he took Ferber's.

"Later all hands were summoned to the saloon. You gave the diamond to the captain before all eyes. When we dispersed, Cartright went to the captain's cabin, waiting there in ambush. Then the assault. He fled with the diamond, cached it in some out-of-the-way corner of the ship, smudging his shirt and nose. He then appeared on the bridge deck. He saw that Ferber had been incriminated by the pearl handled gun, so he followed this lead by chucking his wet clothes under Ferber's bunk."

We threshed it over. The hottest trail led to Cartright because he had got rid of a smudged shirt.

"Otherwise I'd as lief suspect Moreno," O'Brian said. "I never did quite trust that fellow. Well, it's nearly eight bells, when I'm due to go on watch. I'll assign a relief, though, and put in the four hours searching the ship. You, Mr. Anthony, go to bed."

I protested, but he insisted I retire. He

said he wanted me to have a clear brain to help him on the morrow. I retired and slept until eight-thirty in the morning.

TEN OF the twelve members of the saloon mess assembled for a late breakfast. The absentees were Second Mate Deeming and Second Engineer Dolan, who were on watch.

Captain Elias Janes, his head still bandaged, took the head of the table. He was not in nearly so bad a humor over losing the diamond, since it wasn't his own, as he would have been had he lost five shillings at whist last evening. Janes only worshiped money when it was his own. He greeted us formally, "mistering" every one, and made no reference to the events of the night.

No one spoke of it. Ferber talked volubly throughout the meal, but for a theme he compared salt and fresh water fish as food, leading up to the tale of a giant shark he had once knifed while swimming off Cape Town. Cartright, to my surprise, was in a changed mood. Far from glowering, he spoke quite civilly to O'Brian. Of course, he did not know that we had penetrated his ruse of deception with the shoe polish.

Moreno snickered an applause at Ferber's shark story. The engineers, Nuerder and Johnson, ate hurriedly and left the saloon.

When the others were gone O'Brian and I held a conference with the captain. We told him about the wet clothing and the smudged shirt. Janes admitted that the man thought to have been drowned might have regained the ship; and again he commissioned the first mate to take complete charge of the investigation.

"Just as though this ship," he added, "were London town and you were the head detective at Scotland Yard. I'm magistrate; you will bring your findings to me."

O'Brian explained that at daylight he had summoned Dolan, whose personal hobby was photography and who owned a camera. They had taken a dozen close-ups of the thumbprint on the gun. Dolan was now developing the films, on his watch below, and surely there'd be one good one in the bunch. O'Brian added that he had put in four hours looking for the diamond, without success.

During the morning every man of the forty-five on board was summoned for fingerprints. No one was excepted. All hands, cabin boy to captain inclusive, and all passengers, were made to press their thumbs on a sheet of paper after pressing on an ink pad. Each paper was labeled with the subject's name.

While waiting for Dolan to develop his films, O'Brian and I went up to the chart-room. We found Captain Janes writing studiously in the log, entering a second chapter to his record of the crimes. Janes asked us to read it over and add anything omitted, but we could find nothing. We could only applaud the captain's rigid adherence to detail. There were no guesses in his loggings—nothing but known facts.

Anon Dolan appeared with one good photograph out of twelve tries. It was a closeup of a powdered thumbprint on the butt plate of a pearl handled gun.

"I'm no expert at this fingerprint stuff," O'Brian admitted to us. "But time is no great object. We are going to be at sea for weeks and before we make port I'll know which man owns the guilty thumb."

He retired to his cabin to make the comparisons.

When I saw him at noon he told me that so far he had only eliminated four men. He had begun with the four men known to have been on the bridge deck at two bells. That is, Ord, who had been watch officer at two bells; Trask, who had been helmsman at two bells; Willie Peel, who had answered the buzzer, and the captain himself.

"None of those four made the thumbprint on the butt plate," O'Brian told me.

At evening mess he told me that the comparisons were getting along painfully slow.

"I'm a rank amateur at fingerprints, Mr. Anthony," he confessed. "I've eliminated Ferber and Dutwiler. My

sample of Cartright's thumb is not good and I've ordered another one. I'm not quite satisfied with Moreno's, either."

When I went to bed at eleven that night he was still poring over the whorls of human thumbprints. He might be slow, but I knew he'd be sure in the end.

On northwesterly steamed the freighter *Good Hope*. However cursed we were with crime aboard, we were blessed magnificently with fair skies and seas. All next day I paced the bridge deck, eager for a report from O'Brian.

Were we to be isolated for weeks with this mystery? Must we bequeath it in the end to the skill of some sleuth at port? I hoped not, for my sympathies were keenly with O'Brian. I paced the deck and fretted, while the black smoke trailed in our wake and while we crawled eternally on toward ever receding horizons.

Another day passed. All O'Brian would say was that there were a few thumb samples he wasn't sure of, and he didn't want to go off half cocked. At times he quit his study of them to search the ship. In this he enlisted the help of Dolan, whom he trusted more than any other subordinate officer. From bow to stern, from stacks to keelson, the ship was searched without discovery of the huge diamond.

I began to fear that the thief, in his funk, had heaved the thing overboard.

Another day passed. And another. O'Brian took complete new sets of thumbprints and was at it again.

On we steamed up the sea, at never less than seven knots and at never more than ten. We passed no vessel, Cape Town to Savannah not being on any beaten track of transport. We sighted no life except the life of the sea. Once a flying fish, failing to hurdle the ship, landed upon the fore-deck and lay there gasping. I recall that Dutwiler went down and picked it up. He waved it at me, calling out cynically:

"Well, here's another poor fish! That makes forty-six of us, all in the same boat."

Social intercourse in the saloon mess was stilted, with an undercurrent of irritability. Cartright, strangely, became a little more affable all the while, however. Directly after morning mess Janes would ask the mate—

"Anything new, Mr. O'Brian?"

Upon receiving a negative reply the captain would go up and enter in the log:

> Diamond still missing; thief still at large on the ship; identity unknown.

Finally O'Brian reported definitely, in the presence of us all, that the guilty thumb did not belong to any of the forty-five men aboard.

Whereupon Janes immediately went back to the stowaway theory, the stowaway having been drowned at sea.

"Either that," agreed O'Brian, "or else the thumb mark was left on the gun before we drew anchor at Cape Town."

We seemed to be at the end of a blind alley. Cartright perked up more and more, now that he had passed the thumbprint test. He did not know we had penetrated his ruse of shifting shirts.

ONE EVENING Cartright suggested a game of cards. In fact the first evening out of Cape Town we had had a foursome of cards in the captain's cabin, Janes at all times being on the *qui vive* for petty winnings. Janes and Cartright had trimmed O'Brian and me very soundly at auction bridge. Janes was an expert at it, always winning. Cartright I knew to be an experienced gambler. O'Brian and I had been fleece for their shearing.

The night following that game had been the night of the two assaults, and hence there had been no cards since.

"Well, now that I'm proved innocent," remarked Cartright on the first evening after all thumbprints had been given a clear bill, "what about a game of cards?"

To my surprise, O'Brian accepted. Janes was eager to win a few shillings and thus we had the game. The play, as before, was in the captain's cabin. The mate and I lost every rubber.

The next evening we had another game.

And the next.

All this while Ferber was getting chummy with Moreno. I thought that was because the purser was the only one willing to listen to Ferber's stories. General conversation at the mess was less stilted now. Ferber led it, and had evolved a dozen fantastic theories about the case.

He was parading them one evening at mess when all of us, except Moreno, walked out on him. The captain went above. The engineers went below. O'Brian, Dutwiler, Cartright and I went to our several cabins. I read from a book about five minutes. Then Cartright knocked at my door and asked for a tube of shaving paste. I knew that it was his custom to shave once a day, right after evening mess. I gave him a tube of paste.

My book bored me. I went forward to the saloon. Moreno and Ferber were still there, Moreno yessing the theories of Ferber. This bored me more than the book, so shortly I went up for a walk on the bridge deck.

Captain Janes called to me from within his cabin. When I entered I found him setting up his card table. He asked me if I felt like playing bridge.

I didn't. But when a ship's captain suggests a card game it is almost equivalent to a command. I offered to take a hand and he asked me to summon the mate and Cartright.

I went down through the forward companion to the saloon. Ferber was there alone. I did not ask him what had become of Moreno. Passing down the aisle, I glanced in at Moreno's open door. He wasn't there, but he might have been in the room adjacent, which was his office. The next cabin was O'Brian's. O'Brian wasn't there, but a moment later he appeared. He had been below for a word with Dolan. O'Brian agreed without enthusiasm to play auction. We stepped two more doors down the passage to summon Cartright.

I knocked on Cartright's door, O'Brian pausing with me to wait for a reply.

"The captain's all set for another game tonight, Cartright," I called out. "What do you say?"

"Sure thing," we heard Cartright respond nasally from within. "Tell the Old Man I'll be up just as soon as I finish shaving."

O'Brian and I went immediately to the aft port ladder. The last door we passed was Dutwiler's. It was closed.

We ascended immediately to the bridge deck, turning in at the captain's cabin. Captain Janes was seated at his card table, riffling cards. We told him that Cartright would be up directly he finished shaving, and sat down to wait.

Five minutes passed. Ten. Fifteen. Captain Janes, keen for his expected tribute of petty winnings, became a trifle impatient. He did not like to be kept waiting. He looked at his watch. It was 8:16.

Here on the verge of Capricorn, at that hour, it was after dark. It was another still night, warmer than usual. There was no roll, and you could hardly feel the pitch of the ship.

Another ten minutes passed. Still Cartright failed to appear.

"It's taking him a blasted long time to shave," complained Janes peevishly.

It occurred for me that it was out of character for Cartright, a gambler, to keep a card game waiting. Especially when his opponents were to be such easy marks as O'Brian and myself. We waited. One bell struck from the bridge.

An odd prescience of disaster crept over me, and I could see that it was shared by both O'Brian and Janes.

"Maybe we'd better see what's keeping him," suggested the mate soberly.

Far below us the engines thrummed. Beyond that there was no sound on ship or sea. A tension grew among us, hard to explain. Perhaps we were all thinking that since there had been two weird assaults aboard this vessel, there might now be a third. We were all pretty sure that Cartright was in some way connected with that mysterious diamond.

In the end we arose abruptly, and in company descended to the saloon deck.

We went to Cartright's door, where O'Brian knocked. No answer. He called to Cartright. No answer. He tried the door. It was locked.

Just then I stifled a shriek. The passage was lighted. Looking down, I saw a thin dark ribbon of fluid creeping out from beneath Cartright's door. I pointed. The others saw it. O'Brian stooped and touched the creeklet with his finger. It was sticky. It was blood.

Without a word the big mate dived forward, crashing his muscular shoulder against the door.

The door resisted. There was a fire ax on the passage wall. O'Brian took it and hacked a hole through the panel of the door. Through this he reached a hand, releasing the spring lock which locked the portal from the inside. We plunged in, halting abruptly at sight of Cartright. He was dead. We knew instantly that he had been brutally murdered.

He lay crumpled on his cabin floor. O'Brian stooped and reported definitely that he was dead. He wasn't shot. He had been cracked over the skull. Revolted, I turned away. Later I learned that the assault had been much similar to that which had floored the captain two nights out of Cape Town. The difference was that in this case the clubbing had been fatal.

There was no pistol or other weapon about. O'Brian said that the instrument of assault might have been any heavy club. The murderer had either taken it away with him or else chucked it out through the porthole.

This porthole was naturally open on a warm night. No human adult could have entered through its ten-inch diameter. The door had been locked. Locking the door upon retreat would have been simple enough for the murderer; he could have set the spring lock and then merely pulled the door to behind him.

When I had called to Cartright earlier, and he had answered me, I had not tried the door to see whether it was locked. Probably not, since he had only gone in to shave.

Captain Janes was completely unnerved. He told O'Brian to post a guard over the evidence and then summon all hands to be checked up in the saloon. The captain went to the saloon to hold court. O'Brian sent me to fetch Second Engineer Dolan.

I FOUND Dolan in company with his chief, Nuerder. The two had been together since mess and thus had personal alibis. O'Brian posted them in the passage, with instructions to permit no entrance into Cartright's cabin.

I asked the mate if he'd found any clues.

"A few," he said. "First, the motive was not the robbery of money, because Cartright's wallet is in his pocket. It contains one hundred and fifty pounds, approximately half of it in gold coin and half of it in British banknotes. If the motive was robbery, then it was for the big diamond. Cartright himself might have taken the diamond from its cache, or he might have found another man's cache, since the last time I searched him.

"Another thing," added O'Brian, "is his razor." He pointed down at a straight blade razor, not a safety, held in the lifeless hand of Cartright.

"You see," said O'Brian, "that Cartright was in the act of shaving. His shaving kit is set out, there's soapy water in the basin and lather still on his left cheek. His right cheek is shaved, his chin only half shaved, his left cheek quite untouched."

"Yes," I agreed. "You remember he called to us he'd be right up as soon as he finished shaving. Before he finished shaving, while you, Captain Janes and I waited for him in the captain's cabin, some one stepped in here and murdered him."

"Exactly. Now stoop and look closely at his razor."

I did so, and saw that the razor had a large, moon shaped nick missing from the edge of its blade. The missing sector was as large as a third of a dime.

I arose, and O'Brian called my atten-

tion to Cartright's shaving kit, which contained miscellaneous sartorial paraphernalia and was placed conveniently by. In this kit there was an extra razor.

"The extra razor," mentioned O'Brian, "is without nick, and sharp. Possessing two razors, certainly a man with a tough beard like Cartright's would not choose a nicked razor for shaving. That nicked razor would have drawn blood at the first swath, and Cartright's cheek is not cut. The answer is that the nick must have been hacked after he started to shave."

That was logical. But what of it?

"This of it," explained O'Brian. "Cartright was shaving. His assailant entered the cabin. Cartright whirled as the blow was descending. Naturally he struck out in self-defense. What with? With the razor, of course, since he held it in his hand. His swing of defense, futile, nevertheless struck something which broke a large nick from the blade.

"Flesh would not have nicked the razor. The blade must have bit into metal or hard wood. If metal, then the nicked segment or its fragments are on the floor. If a careful search of the floor gives us no steel segment or fragments of it, then the weapon was wood and the nick is still embedded in it."

"But," I objected, "the killer no doubt chucked his weapon out the porthole."

"Likely he did, but possibly he didn't. It might be something which he thinks will incriminate him less if he keeps it than if it's missing from his equipment. Anyway, let's say nothing about this nick in the razor."

We went to the saloon. There Captain Janes held court. Man by man the ship's company was assembled for interrogation.

Most of the crew were immediately eliminated because they had been in mutual presence around the forecastle. Others had been together in the engine room. One mate and one seaman had been together on the bridge. The cook paired with the cabin boy. O'Brian, Janes and I had been together, waiting for Cartright. Only three men lacked an alibi. These were Moreno, Ferber and Dutwiler.

Moreno claimed to have left Ferber in the saloon and gone to his office. Ferber claimed to have been alone in the saloon. Dutwiler claimed to have been reading in his cabin.

Time of the crime was fixed to the very brief interval between Cartright's assurance to me that he would be up when through shaving and the time we found him dead.

There was a good bit of a hubbub in the saloon. Dutwiler broke into a vicious temper and raved at both Janes and O'Brian. Moreno, finding that he was one of only three men without a cast iron alibi, went into a maudlin funk. His protests were whined. Ferber seemed more excited than frightened. Personally I was willing to give Ferber a clean bill because he didn't seem physically strong enough to club Cartright to death.

O'Brian, leaving us all in the saloon, went back to make a detailed search of all staterooms for chance clues, particularly the quarters of Ferber, Moreno and Dutwiler. Later I joined O'Brian. He had found nothing. He was doggedly grim. Crime was pyramiding about his head. Four crimes in all, of which two had been attempted murder and a third successful, a fourth being the theft of the great diamond.

I retired, finally, completely demoralized and exhausted. On up the trackless sea steamed the *Good Hope*, her trail of smoke no denser than the fog of mystery which stifled us here aboard.

FOR THE next forty-eight hours there was no conspicuous event other than the burial, in canvas shroud, of Cartright. We were far from land on a voyage which I knew had been estimated at five weeks. We still lacked a trifle of being halfway to our port of call. Thus we buried Cartright at sea, knowing that among the apparent mourners grouped about the ceremony must stand the killer himself.

A day later it began to rain. There was

no blow, just a sticky, warm drizzle which cheated us of sunlight, pulled in our horizons and laid a dank, clammy hand upon our isolation. There were no more card games. Meals at the saloon mess were sessions of bitter distrust. Moreno, Dutwiler and Ferber ate with us, but they were in effect prisoners, having been ordered not to leave the saloon deck except in the company of a mate.

O'Brian took little sleep. He moved about slowly, but persistently and indefatigably. At times he fairly uprooted the ship for the diamond. At other times he scratched the very boards for clues which might lead him to the killer of Cartright. Every day his jaw set more stubbornly, more grimly; once I saw him flush when we heard Dutwiler refer to him as an "amateur cop."

Was he an amateur? Could a practised sleuth among landsmen have done better? Certainly none of them could have labored more persistently than O'Brian.

He found, during these days, but one new clue. He had assembled all the effects of Cartright, and had finally examined the blue serge trousers worn by Cartright two evenings out of Cape Town, when the captain had been assaulted in his cabin.

He showed me the blue serge trousers.

"You notice, Mr. Anthony," he said, "there are black stains on the knees of these trousers. Cartright changed shirts to fool us, daubing the second shirt with shoe polish for a blind. But he didn't have time to change trousers; anyway the black spots on blue serge were not conspicuous. Smudged on nose, chest and knees, Cartright must have crawled and wriggled into some dirty corner to hide the diamond."

I examined the smudges on the knees of the trousers and thought they were asphalt.

"Tar," corrected O'Brian. "Which doesn't mean so much, because there is a good deal of tar on the ship."

He left me, on a still hunt for every possible source of tar.

The next day he seemed to be getting closer on the true scent. His eyes were brightly excited. He told me that he had found the particular tar deposit which had soiled the nose, chest and knees of Cartright. When I asked where, he evaded, saying he wanted one more clue to pair with the tar clue before it meant anything. He said he was hot on the track of this additional clue and expected to have it before the day was over.

I shall never forget that interval of suspense. In the first place we had a bad roll of weather, so bad that the steward had to clamp on the plate rail to keep our dishes from sliding off the table at noon mess. The roll made me a little seasick. Curiosity alone took me to the midday meal, in case O'Brian had a report; I touched no food.

O'Brian made no report. But he was so preoccupied at noon mess that he gave every one the jumps. Time and again, at the table, he pulled out a notebook and consulted notes. Every one knew he was hot on a track. Moreno had the fidgets. Dutwiler and Ferber were a greenish yellow, but I couldn't tell whether from sea sickness or apprehension. The ship continued to roll. First the captain's end of the table would be highest, then the mate's end. Forks and plates slid first to port, then to starboard, only the clamped railing keeping them from sliding to the floor.

O'Brian excused himself mysteriously, with his food hardly touched, and left the room. I went to my stateroom, so squeamish that I kept to my bunk all afternoon.

By supper time it was still rolling. I went to the saloon, again impelled mainly by curiosity. Eight of us sat down, Captain Janes at the starboard end of the table. O'Brian did not come in immediately; thus the seat at the port end was vacant for the moment. Lining one side of the table were myself, Ferber, Moreno, Dolan and one vacant chair. The vacant chair belonged to the third engineer, who was on watch below.

On the other side were lined Dutwiler, Nuerder, Ord and two vacant chairs. One of the latter had been Cartright's before

his death. The other was the second mate's, who was on the bridge. We were all of us more or less untidy that evening, due to the roll, except Captain Janes, who was customarily neat in his white, tight collared uniform.

The ship rocked to port, sliding tableware; she rocked to starboard, sliding it back. A good thing the rail was still on. Finally O'Brian came in, deeply preoccupied as at noon. Except for an excitement in his eyes he seemed like a sleep walker.

Just as he sat down Ferber chanced to ask an idle question of Moreno. He asked the purser if he wasn't getting beastly fed up with this roll.

The purser replied that he was, that he had tried to make a list of his cargo units that afternoon, but his typewriter kept sliding off its stool.

O'Brian, at the word "typewriter," looked up alertly. "You use a Rex portable, do you not, Mr. Moreno?" he asked.

Moreno turned nervously at the sudden question, then answered in the affirmative. O'Brian took a sheet of crumpled yellow paper from his pocket, smoothed it and read it. I knew that the yellow sheet was the mysterious telegram, or radiogram, found in a pocket of the wet clothing discarded under Ferber's bunk, two evenings out of Cape Town.

Jerkily O'Brian excused himself and left the saloon. He had touched no bite of food. He disappeared into the passage which served the port staterooms. I heard the latch of the first door click. I knew by that that the mate had gone into the purser's office. In a moment we heard the rattle of a typewriter.

Dutwiler looked narrowly across toward Moreno, who ducked his chin and evaded all eyes. It was obvious that O'Brian was ascertaining, by the type, whether it was Moreno's typewriter which had typed that unexplained telegram.

The boat rolled. My coffee splashed. But for the plate rail it would have gone, saucer and all, into my lap.

In a short while O'Brian appeared again. Just as he did so the steward came in with more food. O'Brian was more pre-occupied than ever. He did not sit down. He waited until the steward had delivered the food and then called him aside. He held a whispered conversation with the man. I would have given a good deal to know what it was about. Why, just now, should he consult the steward? The skin which bound our mystery seemed to tighten, threatened to break its bond any minute.

O'Brian dismissed the steward.

"Captain Janes," he said, "I want another look at that pistol. Not the pearl handled one from which we took the thumbprint. I've had that one all the while. I mean the gun found on the deck at the rail where the man went overboard. There was no fingerprint on that one. As I recall it we locked it in your cabin safe."

"Quite right, Mr. O'Brian." Captain Janes produced the key to his private safe and gave it to O'Brian. O'Brian ascended immediately to the bridge deck.

He was gone for thirty minutes. We finished eating. Ordinarily we would have dispersed; but we didn't. We were chained to our places, waiting for O'Brian. We could hardly doubt but that O'Brian would have a statement to make when he returned.

The steward took away the dishes and the cloth, leaving the table bare. He did not take away the plate rail; for all he knew it would still be rolling at breakfast.

We waited. The captain lighted his pipe. Ferber leaned over and borrowed a cigaret from Dutwiler, but I saw his fingers shake when he lighted it. The ship continued its beastly roll, although there were now no plates to slide back and forth. Eight bells struck. The watches changed. Dolan and Ord went out; Johnson and Deeming came in. The latter two had supped on their watches. Obviously they joined us merely to learn what was in the air.

"Is Mr. O'Brian above?" inquired Captain Janes of Deeming.

"Yes, sir. He's in the chart-room, sir, reading the log."

That logically explained why the mate was gone so long. We knew his errand above had been to look at the pistol in the captain's safe. Evidently he had done so, and was now reviewing the evidence which Captain Janes had punctiliously written into the log, day by day.

FINALLY O'Brian came down to the saloon. He remained standing at his end of the table, opposite the captain's end. His very look was enough to startle us. He stood there, legs wide apart, a towering figure. The roll of the ship did not bother him at all. His right fist was clenched and enlarged, as though he might be grasping a stone.

"Gentlemen," he announced, "I've found the diamond. I know who stole it. I know who murdered Cartright."

You could hear the caught breaths. No one challenged O'Brian. We sat for a full minute staring at him, like dolts. The ship rolled. A great sea splashed noisily on our fore-deck, and we could hear it rushing out through the scuppers.

Then O'Brian opened his fist and dropped the great diamond on to the table before our very eyes.

I knew it instantly. Undoubtedly here was the same huge stone of approximately one hundred and fifty carats which I myself had handled two nights out of Cape Town. It did not lay still on the table. It rolled. As the next crest struck our portside, the table became a sharply inclined plane to starboard.

Thus the diamond rolled the full length of the bare board, banging against the plate rail in front of Captain Janes. Janes was too shocked to touch it. Then, in the recoil from the roll, the ship and table tipped back to port and—rattle, rattle, rattle—the big octahedron rolled, slipped and clattered back to the port end of our board.

It continued to roll with each succeeding crest of the seas.

Here it came banging down the rail on my own side of the table. As it passed Ferber his eyes fairly popped from his head. When it passed Moreno, he shrank back from it as though it were a reptile. It clattered against the end rail, rounded it, and went bumping, on the next recoil, down the rail opposite me, past Deeming, past Nuerder and Dutwiler, reaching O'Brian.

But as the rolling seas were never still, so never still was the diamond. We watched it circle our table, in an intense fascination, as gamblers might watch the circling of a marble around a roulette wheel.

I jumped when Captain Janes spoke sharply:

"Well, Mr. O'Brian, we're waiting. If you know who murdered Cartright, put a name to the rascal and I'll slap him in irons."

"With your permission, sir," answered the mate, "I would like to recount the steps which have led me to the guilty man."

"Very well, let's have them," agreed Captain Janes. His narrowed eyes were sweeping first one row of us, then the other.

"I have twelve clues," stated O'Brian. He was still standing, legs apart, rocking slightly with the rolls of the ship.

"The first clue," he resumed, "is that no wound was found on any one, although blood had been shed on the ship."

The diamond clattered to the starboard end of the table. O'Brian waited for it to roll back before continuing.

"The second clue is that there were black smudges on Cartright's chest, nose and knees, right after the assault in the captain's cabin. The source of those smudges was tar.

"The third clue is a small diamond of less than one carat, which I found cached with the big one. Mr. Anthony has told us that the big diamond is worth perhaps thirty-five thousand pounds. This small one can hardly be worth over twenty pounds, or a hundred dollars."

He produced from his pocket a small diamond, smaller than a pea, and held it

exposed in his palm. It was uncut and unpolished, and I checked his valuation of about a hundred dollars.

"Fourth," resumed O'Brian, "there was a moon-shaped nick in the razor blade held by Cartright when he was found dead."

I was holding my breath for O'Brian to name the murderer. All this while the huge diamond was rattling first down one plate rail and then back along the other. We were all, to a man, impelled to follow it with our eyes. No one laid so much as a finger on it. How rudely it must be jangling, I thought, upon the nerves of the murderer! Had I been guilty myself, surely it would have made me shriek a confession to the rafters of the ship.

O'Brian resumed:

"The fifth clue is that the wallet found on Cartright, at his death, contained one hundred and fifty pounds, seventy in British notes and eighty in British gold."

There was a momentary lull between rollers and the diamond stopped against the rail squarely before Moreno. Again the Cuban shrank back as though the stone were the head of a king cobra. Cartright resumed—

"My sixth clue is the typed telegram or radiogram which was found in the wet and blood stained clothing taken from under the bunk of Ferber.

"My seventh clue is that there were no wet socks or shoes to go with that wet clothing.

"The eighth is that the thumbprint found on the butt plate of the pearl handled pistol does not match the thumb of any human found on this ship."

We rocked under the impact of a mighty wave from port, and the infernal diamond clattered down to Captain Janes. Back it came, zig-zagging this time, first bunting one side rail and then the other. Every eye was on it, had been from the first. Rock and roll! Off went the stone on a visit to Dutwiler, sniffing in turn at us, it seemed, like a bloodhound in the bush. Dutwiler jerked a hand away from the rail to keep it from touching his knuckle. No man of us would have aught to do with this lodestone of damnation. Hither and yon it tumbled, while O'Brian listed his clues.

Twelve, had he said? He had given us eight and we knew no more than at first.

"Ninth," resumed O'Brian, "is the character and location of the cache in which I have just found the two diamonds. They were cached in the cork of a life buoy which hangs on the chart-room wall. The canvas cover of that particular buoy has been ripped for two voyages. I myself patched it, six months ago, with a strip of black tape. The thief peeled off that strip of tape, exposing the cork. He gouged a cavity in the cork, inserted the two diamonds, then replaced the tape over the rip in the canvas."

Again O'Brian paused, while the big diamond rolled and clattered around our board. Nine clues were used up, with no conviction. I was beginning to suspect that the mate was bluffing, was permitting the tumbling diamond to get in its deadly work on the morale of the criminal.

"You spoke of twelve clues, Mr. O'Brian," spoke Captain Janes sharply. "You've given us nine, but what of them? Except for the location of the cache and the existence of the small diamond, we knew all your clues from the first. Certainly you have not incriminated any particular individual."

"Possibly not," agreed O'Brian in an unruffled voice. "I do not claim that any single one of my clues will convict the murderer of Cartright. It is when we combine them that the truth leaps at us and compels our belief." He was not looking at Janes, but at the rolling diamond. In fact, his great muscular frame seemed to sway in rhythm with its rollings.

"I come now to the tenth clue," he said. "It is that Captain Janes sailed from Cape Town with seven braided white uniforms, such as he now wears, in his wardrobe. The steward assured me of that fact, and says for many voyages he has pressed and cleaned the captain's uniforms, and that there is one for each day in the week. Yet right now there are only five uniforms in the captain's cabin,

which, with the one he wears, makes six. The seventh is nowhere to be found."

"Eh?" exclaimed Captain Janes alertly. "You say some one has made away with one of my uniforms! The devil! Strange that I haven't missed it!"

O'Brian gave his eleventh clue with a snap. His voice rose.

"It is," he shouted, "written in the log of the ship. In our very ship's log I read what amounts to a confession that *Captain Janes himself* murdered Cartright!"

We were completely stunned. My brain was rocking with the ship. I turned toward Captain Janes, expecting him to arise in his righteous wrath and rebuke the effrontery of his mate. Was O'Brian crazy? If there was one man on the ship who could not have murdered Cartright, it was Janes. Why, Janes had been constantly in the presence of both O'Brian and myself during all the interval in which Cartright could have been killed!

And now the great diamond rolled its final roll. It tumbled down the board and came to rest, on the widest of its eight surfaces, squarely in front of the accused Captain Janes. By an irony of fate the rolling of the ship began to decrease from that moment on.

Captain Janes did not arise indignantly to rebuke his mate. Although his cheeks whitened and began to crease in lines of bitterness, he kept an amazing calm. All he said was:

"Very interesting, Mr. O'Brian, but I do not recall writing any passage in the ship's log which would incriminate me, or you, or Mr. Anthony, or any one else."

"I shall recall it for you, sir," offered O'Brian. His tone and manner were of deference; he was still the mate addressing the captain of his ship. "All your loggings, sir, are commendably in detail. You were wont, in fact, to quote the exact words of all of us, when reporting our claims to alibis for the various assaults.

"You were particularly accurate, sir, when you logged the murder of Cartright. As to that event, I shall read your loggings aloud."

O'Brian took a penciled memo from his pocket and read:

"At eight bells Mr. Anthony came to my cabin on the bridge deck; I suggested he fetch Mr. O'Brian and Mr. Cartright for a game of auction. Mr. Anthony agreed and went down to the saloon deck on this errand. He recruited Mr. O'Brian and the two of them rapped on the door of Mr. Cartright, calling out, 'The captain's all set for another game tonight, Cartright.'

"To which Mr. Cartright, from beyond the closed door, replied, 'Sure thing; tell the Old Man I'll be up just as soon as I finish shaving.' Mr. Anthony and Mr. Cartright ascended to my cabin and delivered the message. We waited half an hour. Mr. Cartright did not appear. We then went down, crashed in his door, found him on his stateroom floor, dead."

O'Brian folded the memo from which he had been reading, placing it in his inner pocket. Janes had been leaning forward, giving sharp attention. The ship was rolling less and less and the great diamond still reposed squarely against the rail before him.

"Is that the passage which you assert incriminates me?" Janes inquired stiltedly of the mate.

"It is, sir."

"What's wrong with it?"

"Nothing's wrong with it. It's astonishingly accurate."

"Well?"

"The truth, sir," explained O'Brian, "is that Mr. Anthony and I did hear, or seem to hear, Cartright call to us in the exact phrases you quote. We went immediately to your cabin. All we told you was that Cartright had agreed to play cards and would be right up. How, then, were you able to inscribe his exact diction in the log? How did you know he used such terms as 'sure thing' and 'tell the Old Man'?

"The answer is that you *spoke those words yourself!* It was your own voice, imitating the nasal twang of Cartright, speaking through the door. Cartright had actually been dead for about ten minutes. You, having murdered him, had retreated to your cabin ten minutes before. You then sent Mr. Anthony to summon Mr. Cartright, knowing that

Mr. Anthony would think he heard Cartright's living response from within a locked cabin."

Captain Janes sat rigid. He grasped the plate rail so tightly that his knuckles were white. Between those grasping knuckles the huge diamond seemed to have found a permanent home.

I WAS grappling with my wits. I waited for O'Brian to explain the illusion of Cartright's voice; instead he went on to his twelfth clue.

"My last clue," he said, "is that I have just found the club which brained Cartright. It is a cylinder of oak; two feet long, an inch and a quarter thick with a metal hook on one end. It is a piece of standard cabin equipment, would have been conspicuous by its absence if thrown overboard, therefore the guilty man returned it to his cabin. No one can say that it was used by some one else during the half hour we waited for Cartright, and later planted in the captain's cabin, because that cylinder of oak was before my eyes all during the interval we waited for Cartright; that is, the interval in which the murderer wanted us to think Cartright was murdered.

"The weapon was merely the towel roller on which the captain hangs his towel. Embedded in it is the moon shaped nick chipped from Cartright's razor."

Janes flinched, his grip tightening on the plate rail. All the while the ship was rolling less and less. No longer could I hear waves breaking over the battened hatches of the fore-deck.

"Just now I borrowed the captain's key," explained O'Brian, "for the stated purpose of looking at the pistol locked there. More particularly I wanted to see if the safe contained the eighty pounds in gold which it contained when I locked the pistol in the safe. It did not.

"While I was there, I looked over the captain's typewriter. I had already examined the purser's. Not the purser's but the captain's typewriter had typed, I found, the fake radiogram taken from the wet clothes."

The mate was now speaking swiftly, ramming home his points by smashing a fist into his left palm.

"It was then the truth began to flash," he said. "I examined the captain's wardrobe. I found only five uniforms, when there should have been six. Finally I looked at the towel roller, and found the nick of razor blade. I then went to the chart-room to review all evidence, and found the logging quoted.

"On the chart-room wall beside me, as I read, hung a life buoy. I had searched all other life buoys, but had skipped that one because it seemed an impossible cache. There is always a helmsman and an officer on the bridge, night and day. How could a thief have cached his loot under their very eyes? Then I recalled that the captain, that first night after holding court in the saloon and after receiving the diamond from Mr. Anthony, had come up and spent a full hour writing in the log. I searched the buoy and found two diamonds. The existence of the second diamond pieces out the entire story."

"You are a better piecer than I am, then, Mr. O'Brian," offered Janes, without any discernible rancor.

His calm, I thought, violated all the rules and rituals of accused murderers. Why didn't he rage? Why didn't he shout denials and heap imprecations upon the head of his mate? He was captain and magistrate, the lone autocrat of his ship. Why didn't he arise and send us scuttling to our cabins?

"It is like a quilt or puzzle," admitted O'Brian, "difficult to piece, which makes it all the more certain that when the pieces finally match, they can do so only in a pattern of truth. Shall I arrange this pattern, Captain Janes?"

"Aye," agreed Janes wearily. "It is all very interesting." His chin was drooped; his eyes were fixed on the diamond.

O'Brian began:

"What actually happened was this:

"An unknown thief came aboard after

dark of the twenty-eighth, just before we weighed anchor at Cape Town. He went unseen to the captain's cabin and asked to purchase passage to America. It was dusk. No one saw this fellow come aboard. You will recall that the stevedores had just cleared from the ship. Possibly this trampish fellow had come aboard by mingling with the stevedores, lingering on deck when they left, making his way surreptitously to the captain's cabin. A past master at skulking, he managed to keep out of sight. He had no money. For a price he offered the captain a small diamond worth about twenty pounds.

"The captain had sold four passages for twenty pounds each, and was eager to earn another such sum. Most important though, he guessed this present customer to be an escaping thief. Very likely the fellow had an entire bag of small diamonds on his person. The captain was covetous. If this thief carried a fortune, why not get it some dark night and then pitch the man into the sea?

"First the captain had to make sure whether the game was worth the candle. He said his only vacancy was the second cabin of his own suite, which was true. He ushered the man in there, probably as the ship was steaming out of port.

"The captain then maneuvered to spy. This he could easily do, being in the adjacent cabin. He discovered that his man had, instead of many small diamonds, a single huge stone.

"A fortune! Greed irresistibly impelled the captain to possess it himself. To do so he must choose his time. He must pick a dark night on a calm sea, when the watch would be at a minimum of vigilance. In the meantime he must keep the passenger concealed; no one must know that he had ever been on the ship.

"So the captain faked a radiogram. There was no wireless aboard, but the thief didn't know that and would be easily deceived. Very sternly the captain went into the man's room and handed him the radiogram. He threatened to turn the man in as a thief. The fellow was frightened. Very likely he was a killer as well as a thief. His very life was at stake. He was willing to make any trade which would avoid his delivery to landsmen police.

"They made some kind of trade. The captain was to get the big diamond. In return he was to stow the man away, beyond sight and knowledge of the crew, until he could be set down safely at some port. The place of stowaway was to be the unused cabin of the captain's suite, supposed to be vacant and thus never entered by the steward. The captain was to smuggle his guest food. Inconvenient, but the captain did not expect to endure it more than one night.

"The concealment," resumed O'Brian, "kept the guest from discovering there was no wireless aboard, and avoided his exposure to officers and crew. If he went overboard, no one would be missed.

"The man was to keep the big diamond until ready to be set ashore. But as a guarantee of good faith the captain demanded his gun, which a crook of that stripe naturally carried. The captain knew he might need to use a gun in dealing with him, and didn't want it to be the automatic which he was known to possess himself.

"The holdup took place the second night out of Cape Town, with the sea calm, the watch lax, and with every condition favorable for an inconspicuous murder. The captain lured his victim to the port rail of the bridge deck; he there held him up with his own gun, demanding the big diamond.

"The man produced it; as he was about to hand it over he must have seen from the captain's eagerness that the intent was to push him over the rail. Thus our man froze to his diamond and resisted.

"We do not know the sequence of blows or clinchings. We do know that, among them, there was a shot which drew blood from the man's left forearm. The man shrieked. Shot and cry put the captain in a hole. In three seconds Deeming would come dashing around the corner of the chart-room. So the captain,

grappling with his victim on the bridge deck, heaved mightily. The victim was knocked over the rail, still stubbornly squeezing the diamond in his left palm.

"The captain, not knowing that the victim six feet downward on the path of his fall had momentarily grasped my porthole, scurried to his cabin, reappearing as though summoned by the shot.

"We know the story of that next hour of confusion. During it our unknown man, having lost a momentary handhold on the sill of my open port, and having lost the diamond with his snatch inward for a more secure grip, went into the sea. He reboarded the after-deck. This he could do because he was in the water squarely against the moving ship, constantly beating for a handhold. The flush after-deck rail, or scuppers, or log line, afforded him such a grip. Once on deck, where to, then? The hatches were battened. One hole was as hot as another, so he climbed the ladder to the saloon deck, finding himself in the passage which gives to the port staterooms.

"He knew he had dropped the diamond into one of those rooms. Which, he wasn't sure. He tried one, Ferber's, Ferber having gone to the poop. The diamond was not on the floor, but the man did see a pearl handled pistol showing from under a pillow on the bunk. Next to his loot a crook always wants a gun. He took this one.

"He then realized that he had something scandalous on the captain and that he might demand the captain's protection. He scurried up an aft companion to the bridge deck. There all was confusion. A score of seamen had assembled to lower boats. Our man was just one more dark shadow of the decks. He made the captain's cabin, got into the second room of the suite and laid low.

"Boats were lowered and he wasn't found. We resumed our course, full steam ahead. Court was held in the saloon. No one was missing. No one was wounded. Mr. Anthony delivered the diamond to Captain Janes.

"We dispersed. The captain went above. He stopped for an hour in the chart-room to log the known events. At his elbow hung the tape patched lifebuoy. In it he cached both the large and the small diamond. Imagine his amazement when, on retiring to his cabin at two bells, he found his supposed victim waiting for him impudently at home.

"At home, I say, because the man was attired from head to foot in one of the captain's white, gold braided uniforms. And why not? He had come in there chilled, wet and wounded, although the slight flesh wound, wetted by salt water, now bled no more than could be absorbed by the flannel shirt. Our man had been forced to wait nearly three hours for his host. Naturally he had removed some of his wet clothing and bandaged his arm. He was of the captain's build, and donned the only dry clothes available, one of the captain's uniforms. Again why not? Weren't conditions reversed? It was the stowaway who now held whip hand over the captain. The captain had attempted a murder and could easily be exposed. Too, our man's confidence was bolstered by possession of Ferber's pearl handled gun. His cue was to force the captain's alliance whether the captain willed it or not.

"So we may picture the captain's amazement when he found this fellow, thought to be lost at sea, waiting for him there in full master's uniform. How far more would the captain have been confounded had he known a third man was stretched, face down with intent to eavesdrop, on the tar roof of that very cabin! That third man was Cartright."

I WAS beyond being jolted. After this last barrage I was ready to swallow either Jonah or the whale. Those about me, I saw, were equally stunned. The ship this while was rolling less and less. The huge diamond still lay against the starboard plate rail, a bad penny come home to Janes. Janes had aged with the minutes. The lines of despair and bitterness were deeper on his cheeks. One could not

look at him without feeling that O'Brian had spoken the truth in every detail thus far.

"I have found prints on the tar roof," explained O'Brian, "which indicate that a man lay there stretched flat on his face. The sun had been warm that day and the tar was soft. It smudged Cartright's nose, chest and knees. I know from Mr. Anthony that Cartright had been a crook and a renegade. When we dispersed at midnight in the saloon, he decided to scout the possibilities of stealing the diamond for himself.

"He ascended to the bridge deck by an aft companion. The captain was still writing in the log. The door of his cabin was ajar. Cartright probably did not intend to steal the diamond that night, but only to spy out where the captain might hide it. But as he approached the cabin he realized that there was a mysterious presence within.

"An opportunist, Cartright climbed to the flat roof of the cabin to see what he could see and to hear what he could hear.

"He was there when the captain came home and found the unwelcome guest. The latter brazenly dared the captain to do his worst. He demanded both the diamond and protection. He saw a buzzer on the wall. He bluffed, put his finger on it, threatened to press it and spill the entire scandal.

"The situation ended in a struggle, and again we can only guess as to the sequence of blows and clinches. We know this; that each man preferred a silent victory. Shooting would bring Ord from the bridge. Thus it was a conflict in which each man tried to club the other to the floor.

"Doubtless the stowaway was clubbing with the pearl handled gun. My guess is that the captain was clubbing with his towel roller. I think that the lurker had bandaged his arm with the towel while waiting; because I remember that when Nuerder later appeared to give first aid he had to look in a drawer for a towel. The towel was an endless chain type, on a roller. The only way the lurker could get it off was to take the roller from its sockets. He laid the roller aside. Thus it was convenient for the captain to snatch it for the inevitable struggle.

"I think, too, that it was because this weapon was a successful bludgeon in that instance that the captain chose it later for his assault on Cartright.

"Anyway the captain was victor in that conflict in his cabin. Both men struck telling blows, but it was the stowaway who went down and out. When he saw he was licked he made good his threat to press a thumb on the buzzer. An instant later he was knocked unconscious to the floor. I say this because we can not piece together the patchwork of my twelve clues into any other pattern."

O'Brian paused, seeming to challenge a denial from Janes. Janes muttered inaudibly. He was whipped. I was in a fair way of being done in myself. Here, suddenly, the mate was popping two murders at us instead of only one.

"A tight corner for the captain. The buzzer had been buzzed. By the time he assembled his wits," went on O'Brian, "the captain heard the cabin boy running across the deck to answer the buzzer. The door was closed, latched by the spring latch at the mere closing. The porthole was open. The room was lighted. The captain then performed a miracle. He allowed himself to be seen prone and bleeding on the floor when he wasn't there at all. He stepped into the other room.

"Willie Peel came, tried the locked door, peered through the open porthole into the lighted room and was willing to swear he saw the captain lying prone and bleeding, face down, in full uniform. Willie rushed to the chart-room. Frightened and blubbering, he took several minutes to make himself clear to Ord. Ord arrived and thought he saw exactly what the boy had seen.

"But he did not. In those intervening three minutes the captain had carried his victim out, across four feet of deck, and heaved him into the sea. The captain then entered his cabin, locked the

door, left the lights on and lay face down on the floor. Cartright, still on the flat tar roof, was an eye witness to this first capital crime."

AGAIN O'Brian waited, challenging a protest from Janes. None came. The sea was almost calm now. Four bells struck. Ten o'clock. The mate had taken nearly two hours to recite the felonies of Janes.

"I herded all suspects down to the saloon," went on O'Brian. "While I had them there on the carpet, Captain Janes came down an aft companion with the bundle of wet, blood stained clothing discarded by his victim. His cue was to encourage the theory of a crook aboard who had stolen the diamond. Who best fit the rôle of this thief? Why not Ferber, since Ferber was already in hot water about the pearl handled gun? Thus the captain chucked the wet clothing under Ferber's bunk. In a pocket of them, forgotten by the captain, was the fake radiogram with which the captain had first attempted to intimidate his victim.

"Days passed. I blundered along. I failed to match the thumbprint; I failed to find the diamond. Meanwhile Cartright was blackmailing Captain Janes. His first touch netted him the eighty pounds in gold which had bought the passages of the four saloon deck passengers. This evening I found it missing from his safe. It checked with the gold found on the corpse of Cartright. If Cartright had stolen it, he would not have carried it openly in his wallet. Too, the captain would have made an outcry. Only one answer—blackmail. Don't you see how the pattern pieces together, Captain Janes?"

There was not even the faintest word from Captain Janes.

"The captain," continued the inexorable brief of O'Brian, "was desperate. He knew that in the end Cartright would get everything he had, even the diamond. He would be in Cartright's power forever, on land or sea. So the captain chose to do away with Cartright. His success with the towel roller suggested that he use it again.

"He schemed his alibi. He knew that Cartright shaved each evening directly after mess, following which four of us usually played cards in the captain's cabin. So he schemed an illusion even more deceptive than that which had deceived Willie Peel. He would let Cartright speak after he was dead.

"He procured a short knotted rope with a hook on one end. He marked a spot on the bridge deck railing directly above Cartright's porthole. When the time came, he sent Mr. Anthony down to summon Cartright for cards. The instant Mr. Anthony disappeared down the companion, the captain hurried across the dark upper deck to his mark on the railing. He hooked his hook and let the rope fall. Five steps down the knots and his head was opposite the open porthole. Cartright was already dead in there, felled ten minutes ago by the captain's own hand.

"The captain, still standing on a knot of the rope, put his head and neck in through the porthole. He heard Mr. Anthony call through the door. He replied in the nasal voice of Cartright. He then scurried back to the upper deck, pitched his rope overboard, and was shuffling cards in his cabin a half minute later when Mr. Anthony and I arrived. The murder seemed to occur in the next half hour. We know it didn't because the captain wrote his own words of deception *into the ship's log.*"

Captain Janes arose suddenly with a jerk. He squared himself. O'Brian had been standing all this while. Down the length of the saloon the master faced his mate.

Instead of the expected explosion of denials and rebukes, Janes spoke civilly:

"Mr. O'Brian, you do not presume to be my judge or goaler, do you?"

"I do not, sir." The response was as formal as the question.

"You quite understand, do you, that I'm the only magistrate aboard?"

"Quite, sir."

"What do you propose to do?"

"To perform my duties as chief mate until we reach port. There I shall announce my findings to the port authorities, charging you with the murder of one stowaway and one paid passenger."

"If you laid hand on me on the high seas, do you know what that would be?" inquired Janes.

"Mutiny, sir; unless I did so to defend my life, or to defend the safety of the ship and crew."

"Very well, Mr. O'Brian." For the first time a snap came into the voice of Janes. He turned to the second mate. "Mr. Deeming, stand by for orders."

In wonder akin to awe, the second mate arose and came to the captain's elbow. Janes sat down, took a paper from his pocket and wrote rapidly in pencil. He handed the memo to Deeming.

"Mr. Deeming, assemble your watch and load this list of supplies into the small boat, the one I use to row ashore from anchorage. Look sharp!"

The final two words cracked. Deeming turned to O'Brian to see if the mate would protest. O'Brian did not move a hand or a muscle of his face. His eyes were fixed on the diamond which lay before Captain Janes.

Janes now picked up this diamond for the first time tonight. He held it forth, saying:

"Mr. Moreno, you will secure this in the purser's safe. Immediately. Look sharp!"

Moreno took the stone as if it were a hot coal, then looked doubtfully toward O'Brian. Still the mate moved no muscle of hand or face. Moreno followed Deeming from the saloon.

Janes scribbled another memo in pencil and called the steward.

"Steward," he snapped, "Assemble this list of clothing and personals from my cabin. Stow it aboard a boat which Mr. Deeming will have ready on the davits. Look sharp!"

Off went the steward.

The rest of us waited there through an awkward half hour, without a further word. I could hardly believe that Janes meant to desert his ship in mid-Atlantic. Was he planning a marine suicide? Or escape? Or was it a trick? He had shown himself a past master of tricks. As we were halfway between Cape Town and Savannah, the least I could figure us was fifteen hundred miles from shore.

Deeming came in and reported the boat was ready.

"Report to me above, Mr. O'Brian," snapped Janes. "Look sharp, sir."

He arose and ascended immediately to the bridge deck. O'Brian, looking sharp, followed him. I trailed along myself. So did Ferber. Dutwiler and Moreno, seeming to have their bellies full of mystery, remained below.

The captain, above, shouted to Ord—

"Cut her to half steam ahead, Mr. Ord."

Ord jangled his telegraph. An answering jangle from below and soon the ship showed less speed.

The small boat known as "the captain's boat," cargoed with food, water kegs and the captain's personal chest, was ready on the davits. As it was not one of the two lifeboats, if the captain deserted in it he would not diminish the lifesaving equipment of the ship.

This while I was aghast. The small boat did not appear fit for heavy weather at sea. The rolls, however, had ceased. The waters were fairly smooth, dark, like black oil under a cloudy sky.

Nearby lay an unbroken bale of three-quarter inch rope, brought by Deeming. The burlap sacking was still on it, just as it had come from the factory. I later learned that such bales are two hundred fathoms, or twelve hundred feet long.

Captain Janes had donned oilskins and was now in the swinging boat. He ordered Deeming to affix the end of the three-quarter inch rope to the bow of his boat.

"Suicide or escape?" I whispered to O'Brian. "Aren't we fully fifteen hundred miles off shore?"

O'Brian amazed me by stating that we

were only a fourth of that distance from shore. He explained that a great circle between Cape Town and Savannah only misses Pernambuco, Brazil, a scant four hundred miles.

"Still, he has less than a murderer's chance," said O'Brian.

"What do you call a murderer's chance?"

"A murderer would have, I'd say, a five in ten chance, before a jury of landlubbers. He'd have less than a one in ten chance if he pulls to sea in a boat."

"Will you try to stop Janes?"

"When I'm in command, yes. While he's in command, no."

"How long will he be in command?"

"As long as he's on deck, or as long as he has a line to the ship."

"Lower away, Mr. Deeming," shouted Janes.

The boat was lowered. In a rough sea it could not have been done, at even half ahead, even from a heavily cargoed tramp. But since Deeming paid out the rope skilfully, and since the sea was comparatively calm, the hazard of an upset was only equal to the hazard of a man who jumps off the runningboard of a car proceeding at five miles an hour.

"Full ahead, Mr. Ord," shouted Janes the instant he was afloat. The telegraphs jangled and we gained speed.

"Mr. O'Brian!" shouted Janes.

"Aye, sir."

"Tow me rope's length astern, full ahead."

"Aye, aye, sir."

Deeming paid out the rope. Darkness enveloped the captain, in his boat, trailing now farther and farther astern. We were at full ahead. When all the twelve hundred feet of rope was paid out, we knew, by the slight tension, that we were towing him.

"What are the chances of picking him up?" I asked O'Brian.

"Figure them yourself," said O'Brian. "By the time we stop and steam astern, or circle back, he'd be a mile off in the night in an unknown direction. If we hit him at all we'd probably cut him in two. By dawn he'll be out of our horizons."

"The line has slacked, sir," reported Deeming.

We hauled it in, finding a knife cut end.

That was the last we ever saw of Captain Janes.

GUN RUNNING *on the* SPANISH MAIN

By GENERAL RAFAEL DE NOGALES

"*VAMOS, AMIGO,*" shouted my A.D.C, Lieutenant Juan Perez, to a filthy beachcomber whose untidiness had brought him the nickname of El Piojoso, whose thirst had induced him to accept his wages as foreman of stevedores in liquor rather than in money—his own preference—and whose laziness was as positive as the filth on his greasy shirt. Lieutenant Perez was reminding him gently of his tasks by tapping him on the back with the flat of his *machete*.

Our schooner, *La Rosa*, was riding at anchor off the dune swollen shore of Cozumel, a small island near the coast of Yucatan. We had to take aboard a number of mysterious boxes—containing rifles and ammunition for the Honduran revolutionists.

As we were in a hurry to fly our sails, we had had to impress into service a crowd of Maya Indians and halfbreeds, sulky, dangerous as only that region of the sea and land can produce them. Rounded up at a rum shop, stimulated by an offer of quick wages and a threat that they might get hurt, they were now cooperating unwittingly in the establishment of a just and decent government in Honduras. El Piojoso was their foreman, because he had humor and was therefore more tractable than his comrades. Most of them were ex-convicts from the prison camps of Quintana Roo, in Mexico, where they had been made to gather rubber and chicle in exchange for their sins, and where they had seen the Maya Indians swoop down on their camps, cut down the prisoners in

their chains and carry away alive only those that could play musical instruments.

El Piojoso, I must confess, was a sterling fellow within his limits. He underwent fits of activity, and worked like mad for some time, helping the men at their tasks, giving advice on the handling of the boxes and proving himself generally useful —until the thirst smote him in the tropical heat. Then he would roll on his belly and bawl that he had been bitten by a snake and must swig *aguardiente* immediately or die.

"A drink, a drink, quick, señor, unless you want me to die like a poisoned pup at your feet!"

He would get the drink, gulp it down with a beatific expression on his grimy features and return to his work like an inspired devil.

I asked him once what he felt when he was imbibing the rat poison.

"Ah, señor," he answered, "it is as if a choir of angels were gliding down my throat."

The rifles and ammunition we were loading aboard had lain buried in the churchyard of San Bernardino, a disreputable fishing; smuggling and hell-brewing village off which we were anchored for over a year, peacefully reposing under the epitaphs of dead smugglers and coast pirates. Father Martinez, the priest of the place, had been its guardian and, to us, engaged in fighting President Jimenez and his bosom friend, President Estrada Cabrera of Guatemala, it was an invaluable treasure that had come out of those graves.

Estrada Cabrera, especially, had drawn my anger by offering five hundred dollars for my head. Before the game was over I intended to make him raise the offer to at least five thousand, and these boxes that El Piojoso's men were loading aboard were the chips with which I was to raise his meager ante.

El Piojoso's back had to be caressed again and again with the flat side of a *machete* because Father Martinez had signaled us frantically from the shore, waving his brick shaped black hat at us and pointing toward the eastern horizon. There a faint grayish column of smoke could be seen rising vaguely out of the sea. Through my field glasses I descried the tip of a smokestack and I knew what we were in for.

It was the Mexican cruiser *Sonora*, which had been sighted in Cozumel waters the day before by some fishermen. Porfirio Diaz, President of Mexico, had sensed the "corpses" in the San Bernardino churchyard with his old buzzard's nose and had sent a cruiser to patrol the sea in that region and get hold of the disinterred "dead." He was always ready to lend a helping hand to his confrères in Central America.

I could not help laughing at the curious figure cut by Father Martinez on the beach, his black tunic swelling like a balloon in the breeze, his body whirling frantically with outstretched arms, resembling nothing so much as a ventilator gone crazy. The poor man had a certain stake in our getaway. If Porfirio Diaz had discovered that it was he who had been hiding the fatal boxes his life would have been worth less than a day of El Piojoso's wages.

After paying our peons and sending them ashore on the dilapidated lighter, we hoisted anchor and set our sails to the wind, which was blowing strongly and in our favor. Father Martinez sank on his knees and, I suppose, thanked heaven for having been delivered of us.

The *Sonora* dallied nonchalantly along the horizon for awhile, and then made for us. But our rigging was creaking in a powerful wind, and evening had fallen before she approached within striking distance. In the darkness we gave her the slip, flying over the waves like a bird and, instead of following our old course due west, we turned north and at about midnight reached the shores of Quintana Roo, protected for miles to seaward by reefs and sandbanks into which the *Sonora* would not dare to follow.

At sunrise the cruiser spotted us and trained her guns on our schooner, but she was out of range. In plain sight of her

officers, we sailed along the shore, taking careful soundings, avoiding the sandbanks easily in our lighter ship, looking for the entrance of one of the numerous lagoons that dot the swamps along the coasts of Quintana Roo.

We were looking for a break in the most dismal landscape that I have ever seen—a low, grayish line of dry jungle vegetation, fringed by thick mangrove growths—a snakes' paradise. Across the blue expanse of the tropical sky a string of snow-white egrets would occasionally wing their lazy way, while in the olive-green water below the fins of many sharks cut thin disappearing lines.

At last we found an opening on the shore and glided into a sleeping lagoon, where we dropped our anchor. The *Sonora* had put one of her poor searchlights into commission, and she swept the night with it to detect any attempt on our part to leave for the open sea. Her captain would catch hell from old Porfirio if he let us slip through his fingers. He knew it, and we knew it. So we prepared to receive a landing party of marines, our rifles ready, the men lying about the deck, all set to answer a call to arms at any moment.

That night, while Juan Perez and I were discussing the possibilities of our situation on the stern of the schooner, an apparition disengaged itself from a bundle of sails and came shambling toward us. It was no one less than El Piojoso himself who, instead of leaving for the shore in the lighter with the other *peons*, had crawled under the sails to sleep off his last payment—three bottles of *aguardiente*. For thirty-six hours he had been oblivious to the mess he had let himself into. When we told him, and he caught sight of the *Sonora's* lights, he set up a howl that shattered the silence of the night for miles around.

El Piojoso had been in Quintana Roo before—as a convict and as a prisoner of the Indians—and he knew that there was no escape in that direction. He knew that godforsaken coast and he didn't like it. He knew that Mexican soldiers operating in that wilderness usually carried musical instruments with them in order to be spared by the Indians, who delighted in gathering brass bands together and listening to their noise. And he remembered that as a musician he was such a good barber that he had been condemned to be hacked to death in honor of some god or other, in spite of all his blowings on a tin whistle through a rum bottle, the bottom of which had been knocked off. He had escaped miraculously, while other prisoners were being slowly chopped to pieces, in the din and excitement of the ceremony, and had wandered the snake and jaguar infested jungle for weeks before coming to the coast and being rescued by a passing schooner.

The Mayas were originally a highly civilized Indian nation—before Columbus—and, after adopting Christianity during the Conquest, they had reverted to barbarism and declared war to the knife on all Spaniards and Mexicans. Their capital city, Chan-Santa-Cruz, was situated in the heart of the Quintana Roo territory and consisted of several hundred walled-in, circular or square, thatched huts, each sheltering several families. El Piojoso remembered the grotesque village with shudders half caused by horror and half by the liquor with which he was besotted.

After telling his story, something seemed to snap in El Piojoso's brain. He jumped up with a howl and began running up and down the deck, screaming. To prevent him from waking up all the Indians of the neighborhood, we poured a half pint of *aguardiente* down his throat, and it went to his backbone immediately, stiffening it. He drummed on his chest and declared himself ready to fight all the Mayans in existence, with or without musical instruments.

IN THE morning the situation had not changed; the *Sonora* was lying at anchor in the distance, with her heavy guns raised in a forty-five degree angle—ready to blaze away at us if we attempted to

make a rush for the sea and slip along the shallow waters of the coast in a westerly direction. One of her steam launches was cruising off the mouth of the lagoon, keeping a close watch on us, although remaining carefully out of range of the rifles of half a dozen of our men posted on a sand dune to guard the narrow entrance of the lagoon.

Perez was of the opinion that we should bury the arms and ammunition and hike it overland to Valladolid, the nearest town of Yucatan, sacrificing our schooner, against the possibility that the *Sonora* should send a strong landing force to attack us. I objected to his proposal; I had an idea that the *Sonora* would do nothing of the kind, but wait patiently off the coast for us to come out. The Mexicans knew that if we stayed there long enough we would all die of black swamp fevers or at the hands of the Maya Indians, who would not be long in finding out that we were there.

Our only hope of escape was, therefore, that some storm might come up; a storm that would force the *Sonora* to put farther out to sea, which would enable us to skip out and, coasting along the shore, slip into another swamp lake without the *Sonora's* noticing it.

The lagoon in which we had taken refuge was, so far as we could see, surrounded by an endless desert of palmetto and *guaraguao* bush land; the *guaraguao* being a thorny scrub tree six or eight feet high, with long, curved, vicious thorns similar to the talons of a dwarf hawk called in Maya language *guaraguao*—from which those bushes derive their name.

Those *guaraguao* lands form an impenetrable bush desert, fringed by the virgin forest, through which narrow trails made by the wild animals or by the Indians weave their way. These narrow zig-zag trails form the only means of communication through that dry bush land, a reason why the Indians generally keep shy of it, except during their hunting trips or when they cross it during their inroads into the cultivated coast district of Yucatan, in quest of booty and war prisoners to offer to their "*santos*."

In those days Colonel Victoriano Huerta —later General Huerta, President of Mexico—was engaged in fighting the Mayan Indians. He had numerous troops and gangs of chained prisoners cutting broad parallel lanes through those bush deserts to intercept the retreat of the marauding Indians. If we buried our guns and ammunition and tried to hike it across country to Valladolid in order to escape from the *Sonora*, we were apt to fall into Huerta's hands, in which case we would have merely jumped from the frying pan into the fire. I resolved therefore to stay where we were and see if some unexpected opportunity would offer itself.

In the meantime I decided to explore the shores of the lagoon, and started that same morning in a dory with El Piojoso—who was by that time sober as a judge—and two of our Mexican volunteers, in the direction of its eastern shore, where some kind of slough or slowly running rivulet seemed to enter the lagoon. We took empty kegs along in case we found fresh drinking water.

After paddling for half an hour along the marshy mangrove shores of the swamp lake, which seemed to be seething with sharks and alligators, we reached a thicket of tall Scotch grass from which a trail led into the bush desert. It showed in various places fresh human footprints, probably made by Indians or runaway criminals from the chain gangs of Colonel Huerta's expeditionary forces. After tying our dory to some bushes, we followed the trail. El Piojoso, who was an experienced backwoodsman, led the procession. I walked two steps behind him. Soon our clothes were torn to shreds by the sharp hooked *guaraguao* thorns which scratched and lacerated our arms and legs, while every once in awhile we sank up to our armpits in the soft, water soaked jungle soil.

As we were passing in a stooping position beneath some thick *guaraguao* bushes, El Piojoso, who was crawling on hands and knees directly in front of me, let out a frightful yell and remained motionless, with his terrified eyes riveted on a large

yellow snake which seemed to be only calculating the distance—for of a sudden it uncoiled and whipped itself at El Piojoso's face—only to fall back with a thud a few inches away from him.

His agonized shriek and the report of my gun were almost simultaneous. After the smoke vanished we saw the snake across the bush trail shot to pieces by the heavy buckshot load. Only then did we notice the thin rawhide thong with which it had been tied, like a dog by a chain, to a nearby bush. It was a *sentinela*, one of the many devices of the Indians to protect the trails leading to their *rancherias* from intruders. Their village could not be far off.

In less than two minutes the bushes around us began moving and one after another a dozen or two wild faces, with knives held between their teeth and *machetes* and rusty shotguns in their hands, were staring at us. Before we could drop to the ground to defend ourselves, one of these Indians addressed us in pure Spanish to the effect that we had nothing to fear because they were themselves *cristianos*, and to prove his statement the speaker held aloft a polished bronze crucifix and, laying down his gun, advanced resolutely toward us.

He turned out to be a civilized, full blooded Sonora Indian, formerly a student in the seminary of Mexico City, who had been deported by order of Porfirio Diaz to those snake infested swamps of Quintana Roo together with a couple of hundred other Yaqui Indians, as a punishment, to work in the plantations as slaves.

He and several of his companions had managed to escape and, together with a dozen or so deserters of the Huerta forces, had reached and buried themselves alive in those godforsaken swamps, living from the fish and game they could procure. Our arrival was for them a great piece of luck. In fact, it was their salvation, their only chance to escape, for no schooner or even fishing boat ever approached those lagoons for fear of the Indians.

After having assured ourselves that the young Indian was telling the truth, we went to their miserable *rancheria*, which they had protected "Indian fashion" with venomous snakes tied to the bushes along the trails. There we found half a dozen more of those poor wretches in a dying condition, eaten up by fevers.

I immediately accepted their offer to come along with us, in the first place because they were expert shots and hunters, and secondly, in order to increase our force with a score more riflemen. With that reenforcement, which brought our troop to thirty-eight, I felt confident of being able to fight off any Mexican landing force that should try to attack us.

That evening before sunset I deployed my men, all of them, on the sand bank, so that the Mexicans on the steam launch could see them and realize that they had to deal with thirty-eight well armed *revolucionarios*. Perhaps that is the reason why they left us alone for a couple of days, thus giving us the necessary time to do some hunting in order to increase our larder with half a ton of jerked shark's meat.

Despite the fact that we were practically between Scylla and Charybdis—the *Sonora* on one side and the marauding Maya Indians on the other—we enjoyed those two days of unique hunting; for our new allies were experts in catching alligators and sharks with very rudimentary implements. The alligators, for instance, they captured by means of long ropes at the end of which were attached two-foot wooden spikes, pointed at both ends. While the alligators were basking leisurely in the glaring sunshine on a mud bank, ten or twelve men would sneak up behind the reptile through the bushes, holding one end of the rope, while one, holding the pointed spike by the center with his extended arm, would crawl on his belly, inch by inch, dragging the loose rope behind him over the muddy bank, straight up to the sleeping alligator and jam the spike vertically into the saurian's open jaws.

Instantly the frightened alligator closed its jaws, both ends of the spike penetrating and catching in the soft flesh of the

roof and bottom of its mouth; whereupon the spike-man would jump up and run while his companions dragged the captured alligator like a roped steer on the sandy embankment and killed it by chopping it across the root of its tail with their *machetes*.

The way they caught the sharks was also very interesting. One of them would jump overboard as a living bait, whereupon the nearest shark made a rush for him. But the man was quicker than the shark, diving under it every time the latter turned around to grab him. In that manner the hunter drew the shark nearer and nearer to the shallow shore water. When he had him in six or eight feet of water, half a dozen other hunters jumped into the lagoon and, diving around the shark with lightning speed, like so many sardines, finally slashed his stomach open with their knives.

In such a way we managed to amass about half a ton of jerked shark meat in less than two days, besides the meat of several *toninas*, or sea cows, and a couple of deer which we shot.

SHORTLY before dawn on the third day, taking advantage of a thick mantle of fog that had settled over the lagoon, we hove anchor and noiselessly hoisted sail. A favorable breeze pushed us gently out of the lagoon and along the coast. By keeping to the shallow waters, we should be out of the *Sonora's* gun range. When the cruiser's crew caught sight of us, after the fog had lifted, we had gained four miles on her, measured along the coastline, and were rapidly approaching the entrance of another lagoon.

After hours of careful sounding, we struck the channel leading into it just before nightfall. We followed the channel for more than a mile, seeking a good anchoring place. Unfortunately, we had to drop anchor less than a hundred yards from the shore, and millions of singing mosquitoes, ravenous for human flesh, settled upon us and almost devoured us. Several snakes appeared on board, though how they got there I don't know. One of them sent El Piojoso scrambling up the mast ladder, howling. The rest of us could not pay too much attention to snakes or mosquitoes, but had to lie in wait, rifles in hand, behind the gunwale of the schooner for a possible landing party of marines.

The officers of the *Sonora* were planning a surprise for us that evening. The searchlight plied the waters of the canal against any attempt to escape on our part. The buglers kept up a continuous clamor on her decks, probably to attract the attention of the Indians to the presence of white men with coveted musicians among them. If the Indians attacked us in earnest, we would probably have to leave the lagoon, and then a boarding party from the cruiser might try its luck against us.

I have seldom undergone such acute suffering as I did that night on account of the mosquitoes. My face swelled to what seemed to be twice its normal proportions, and it was only with the greatest effort that I could keep my fingers nimble. And the hours dragged by, slow, cumbersome, interminable.

Finally, about three in the morning, we heard, with a welcoming feeling of release, a soft splash of water in the direction of the entrance of the lagoon. A few minutes later we descried two large shadows approaching our schooner from that direction. They were two boats manned by Mexican marines. When the first boat, which seemed to be taking soundings, appeared around a bend of the mangrove covered shore, we opened a heavy fire upon it. The Mexicans answered shot for shot, not appearing to mind the heavy toll which our bullets were taking among them. One of my sharpshooters picked off the officer at the rudder. The poor fellow threw up his arms and fell headlong into the water. We heard his agonized cry as a shark dragged him to the bottom. His death, and the sustained fire from the gunwale of our schooner, soon forced both boats to veer sharply and head for the cruiser as fast as terrorized men could row them.

Unfortunately dawn came clear, without the trace of fog, and we feared that if we left the lagoon the *Sonora* might be able to draw sufficiently near to us to send the schooner to the bottom with her guns. There was nothing that we could do but remain where we were, ready to repel a fresh attack.

With the arrival of the sun the mosquitoes left us, and we dropped on the deck to snatch a few hours' rest. Juan Perez, with El Piojoso and another man, remained on the watch. El Piojoso took on this duty voluntarily. The scare that snake had thrown into him would not allow him to sleep. Probably because it was an actual snake, and not an alcoholic nightmare.

About noon a long, feathered arrow fastened itself with a thud to the side of the schooner. A flight of other arrows followed, wounding two of our men. The air was rent by the blood curdling long-drawn-out howls of a band of Mayan Indians, whose faces could be seen among the mangroves, bronzed and fierce.

Half asleep, swollen, dazed, we tumbled to the gunwale and opened fire on the lurking shapes. We wounded some of them, but most of our shots went wild. With the *Sonora* outside, waiting for us like an alligator with wide open jaws, and the Mayas attacking us from the shore of the lagoon, our position could not be called enviable.

Fortunately, the Indians did not seem to have canoes. But the steady sound of chopping *machetes* made us realize that they were preparing to build rafts. That night we could expect a boarding party, hot after our scalps, our musical instruments, and our bones to heap up in an offering to their "*santos*." We prepared to withstand a close siege, with marines from the Mexican cruiser probably taking a hand—discreetly, of course, for they were as likely to be attacked by the Indians as we were if they entered the lagoon. Just before sunset a large cloud appeared on the eastern horizon, and half an hour later a furious gale was blowing out to sea. The *Sonora*, fearing no doubt to be thrown against a sandbank, took up her anchor and stood a few miles farther from shore. An electrical storm broke over us, shattering the sky with lightning, and then the rain fell torrentially, neutralizing the effects of the *Sonora's* searchlight.

That was the opportunity for which we had been desperately praying. We flew up our sails and let them catch the storm, which took us out of the lagoon as if the schooner had sprouted wings. Protected by the screen of rain, we followed our course recklessly along the surf line.

Several times during that wild thundering night we were almost thrown against the shore, but a combination of skilful maneuvering, and revolutionists' luck, kept us on our boiling, blowing course. For the second time we gave the *Sonora* the slip. But that ship was a diehard, and this sinister shadow of Porfirio Diaz loomed behind its officers.

She could not afford to give up the pursuit. At dawn, there she was again, hard on our heels, like the traditional yellow pup, wasting her ammunition in an effort to scare us into surrendering.

While rounding a bush covered dune cape, we sighted—with what relief it may be imagined—another lagoon. Its entrance was very narrow and appeared, from the color of the water, to be also very shallow. We skidded in easily, the *Sonora*, as usual, dropping anchor patiently outside the line of reefs and sandbanks. But that time we had wandered into a fox's lair. The lagoon had several openings on the sea. This, of course, we found out only after several hours of sounding and exploring.

One of the other entrances was sufficiently deep to allow our schooner to pass out to sea a few miles west of the place where the *Sonora* exercised her unending and confident patience. To put her captain at this ease, we went ashore, within sight of a boat he had sent to patrol the shallows—out of rifle range, however—and pitched our camp there, lighting a few big fires and preparing some food.

When darkness came I had a tall, straight palm tree cut and despoiled of its

crown of foliage. This was planted on the shore of the lagoon, towering over the bushes, and rigged with all our extra sails. From the sea it would appear that our schooner was moored close to the shore of the swampy lake, with her sails flapping on her mast. After supper I installed myself in one tent and Juan Perez in another, while the rest of the men, barring the guard left on board, hung their hammocks from the stunted trees and prepared for a quiet evening.

Only the weird voices of the wild fowl broke the stillness of the tropical night. Lying on an outspread blanket in front of my tent, I kept my eyes on the searchlight of the *Sonora*, which roamed the darkness uneasily, throwing bright streaks over the bush jungle that covered the neck of land separating the lagoon from the sea. In the moonlight, I could see the silhouettes of my men, resting in their hammocks, with an arm or a leg dangling out peacefully. The shadow of a *vampiro*, or giant bat, would circle occasionally over the smoldering fires, and swoop down on an exposed arm or leg to suck a few drops of blood. About two hundred yards from my tent lay the carcasses of two big alligators we had shot that afternoon.

Suddenly the sentry at my side jumped up silently and pointed in their direction. A long shadow was gliding noiselessly toward them. The shadow then stood still, and two eyes gleamed at us across the darkness. It was a jaguar. It stood perfectly quiet for a moment; then it took the tail of one of the alligators in its teeth with a cracking sound and, forcing its right shoulder under the long, stiff alligator's body, disappeared with it into the bushes, like an ant carrying away the long trailing body of a fishworm.

After everything had quieted down once more, we took our things aboard, took up the anchor and made our way to the sea through the entrance we had discovered that afternoon. I suppose that the *Sonora* stayed several days watching the mast we had rigged up in the swamp, and finally, sending a party of marines on a raiding expedition, captured the old sails. I hope Porfirio Diaz enjoyed the trophy and placed it in the National Museum as a sample of one of his few failures to get what he wanted.

Three days later we sighted the Honduran coast and, after leaving behind us the lights of Puerto Cortez sparkling on the southern skyline, we anchored off the coast near the Guatemalan border, where ready hands loaded the rifles and ammunition on pack-mules that night.

At the head of a band of *bravos* I set out immediately to cross the frontier and pay a little visit to my old friend, Estrada Cabrera, just to see if he would raise the ante on my head from the paltry five hundred dollars he had offered to some sum more nearly in keeping with the game we were playing.

A Tragic Little Tale of Civil War—and After

REBEL YELL

By MacKINLAY KANTOR

YANKEES!

They had taken his voice; they had snatched his youth from him, and his love; they had hogged his whole life and trampled it beneath their heels . . . No wonder that Lucius Colvin hated them.

Clear as the memory of the copper tubing he had found on Saturday was the memory of that September morning, sixty-odd years before, when Lucius Colvin last went into action with Joth Allerton's Tigers. He was creeping through a thicket, glaring eagerly down into the leafy valley where Yankee horses whinnied and Yankee cavalrymen advanced. Lucius was just selecting a portly sergeant as the next target to honor his exacting rifle, when the whole sky split into a white flame.

A Yankee shell had struck the ground beside him.

That was all Colvin knew until three days later, when he trembled into consciousness in the cabin of a mountaineer.

The war moved away to the South and East, and still Lucius lay in the mountain cabin. Members of the family were impoverished and fond of corn liquor, but they were kind to him. Whatever warlike sympathies they had were with the rebels. He lay there until spring; hill flowers were a-bloom before he could move about on a rough crutch. Yankee scouts climbing the paths would look him over with brutal glances.

"Hello, Johnny, did a bear bite you?"

"How's Jeff Davis?"

His thin face would twist in speechless rage.

"Missing," he was chronicled. "Dead," said his father and sister in Louisiana. "Dead," said Katherine Mollet . . .

And he was perfectly willing to remain dead—to them.

He had written his name on the fly leaf of a Bible for his mountaineer friends, and an itinerant minister spelled it out for them.

"Dumb Luce," they called him—Pap Johnson, and snuffy faced Mam, and the two boys, Jas and 'Liath . . . He earned his corn bread; he tended garden, and reared a litter of pigs each season from the old black sow, and rode an antiquated mule down to mill. "Dumb Luce—Johnson's Luce, what was all dumbed-up an' crippled-up in the wah."

The family trekked north a few years later. Hard times had come to Galley Ridge and Pap Johnson heard of better lands in the far Northwest. They starved their way across three States into the realm of corn and prairies, and at a bustling Northern village Mam sickened and died. Their emigration never moved farther. 'Liath and Jas were grown, now, and worked for neighboring farmers; the four men "batched" in a crazy cottage and raised a small acreage of crops.

One of Joth Allerton's brave gray Tigers, creaking along corn rows on a wooden leg, saliva dripping from his lips whenever he tried to make intelligible sounds . . .

The Johnsons knew little about farming in that eager, scrambling country. The boys drifted West and vanished. When Pap died of "stomach inflammation", Lucius stumped to town with empty pockets. Neighbors had taken the chickens and pigs and mule, for debts which they claimed Pap owed. Work was hard to find—that is, work for a dirty, dumb man with a wooden leg.

Lucius Colvin went to the dumping ground. And he had stayed there, nearly sixty years.

Through the era of whiffletrees and wash bowls and ragged feather boas; on into the age of platform rockers and galvanized iron and egg crates; down to the modern years when he found batteries and spark plugs and golf sticks . . . Beneath the grimy hands of Lucius Colvin, the town's domestic tatters were sorted and squeezed into burlap bags which he dragged to the professional junk dealers.

Old Luce, they called him.

"You know—Peg Leg Luce, the old tramp down at the Dump."

For many years he had boarded at the home of Mrs. Prohack, a measly cottage back of the lumber yards. There were vermin and ragged bedding and smells of garlic in the Prohack house. But what were vermin and rags to a man who had spent his life limping over a rubbish heap?

THE Grand Army of the Republic had come to town for its annual encampment. Lucius saw red banners stretching across the bricky distances of Uptown—Uptown, to which he was a stranger. He made out the wording:

WELCOME G.A.R. SAVIOURS OF OUR COUNTRY

Yankees! The fiends who had taken his voice and his right leg.

Thinking, as he pawed over a pile of mattresses and eggshells:

"If I could talk, I'd show them. I'd *show them.* Wave the Stars and Bars, and holler fer Jeff Davis—"

That night he made a pencil sketch, clutching back into the caverns of his mind for its picture. White here, and red there, and—how many stars? Eleven stars. The flag carried by Joth Allerton's Tigers. Why—God of all armies!—he, Old Luce, had grasped the colors when they were shot down at Bridal Spring!

He scrawled his directions to Mrs. Prohack, before he went out to the dump on Tuesday morning.

> i wish yoo to mak a flag like this mak a Big Won i will pay yoo too dollurs for itt must be reddy by Wensday

Mrs. Prohack snickered and peered near-sightedly at the crude sketch.

"Ole Man Luce," she muttered. "Ole Man Luce he want a flag to wave. Huh! Two dollars to make that? I buy one for ten cents, you bet!"

She bought it at a second hand store on Center street and gave it, still wrapped in brown paper, to Lucius that night. His hand shook frightfully. He hid the parcel under his mattress, not daring to open it then.

Other ragpickers wondered at the absence of Peg Leg on Wednesday.

"Must be sick," they thought. It never occurred to them that he might go uptown to see the parade.

The parade came down Center Street . . . Shrill, eery fife notes split the air and spun a wavering mist about the trooping column of veterans.

> . . . O tell my mother
> When I go home—
> I go home—

Lucius Colvin was leaning against a lamp post in front of the Masonic Temple. His face had been washed, and his beard trimmed with a pair of Mrs. Prohack's scissors, but his clothes still smelled of the city dump. People stood away from him, even though the curb was crowded.

The long tube of brown paper was in his hand. *Hooray for Jeff Davis!* O God, if they'd only left him his voice—

He didn't mind the leg . . . But still he had his hands. He could wave the flag. Flaunt it, mockingly—

The Michigan Department passed with a rattle of wild drums and a trembling shadow of gilt fringed flags.

"Now," he thought, but waited still.

Illinois veterans. All decked with flowers and gay badges, and cheering back as the crowd whooped at them with one rocketing roar.

It had been Illinois troops, that day in the mountains—O God, if he could only stretch his dead throat and scream.

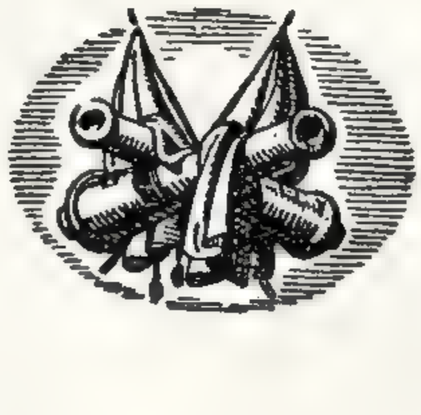
Appallingly, he cut loose with one shrill, unearthly screech.

"Oo-ay!" Above the clapping of hands —"Oo-ay!"

His brown fingers tore the paper from the flag; it fluttered spiritedly. It was Red and White and Blue—it was not the Stars and Bars . . . The same flag the Yankees had! The same flag—

"Jeff Davis!" his soul screamed, but all he could sound was that shrieking, "Ay—ay—ooray!"

He stood there, tears swelling out of his eyes, his mouth clapping open and shut, his Yankee flag beckoning valiantly as the Yankee lines limped past.



The FOREHEAD *of*

CHAPTER I

THE SKULKER

BETWEEN the native village of Allora, wrapped in pagan slumber, and a grubby, low draft freighter that hugged the shadow of the mangroves just below the mouth of Atba Creek, there was no visible connection whatever. And the Marsden & Company launch, with Kingdon on board, heading at full speed from Warri to Forcados, would not have hinted at even the slightest suggestion of a link in the mind of any one in the Nigerias.

Harth, senior assistant for Marsden's, leaning on the rail of the house veranda and watching the lights of the company's launch disappear beyond a solid bank of bush, had no reason at all to give the matter a thought. He had just said goodby to Kingdon, who was at once his boss, his very best friend and almost his god; and as Kingdon had departed upon urgent business to Forcados, Harth was now waiting to enjoy the privilege of applying, without interruption, a soporific right hook to an absent junior assistant's jaw.

This junior assistant's name was Randolph. John Randolph. Kingdon and Harth and the rest knew this much. They knew also that Randolph was a young man with spun gold hair, a peach blossom complexion, a childlike blue eye, a mother and a girl at home, and a gift of language

GOLIATH

By ROBERT SIMPSON

The author of "Calvert of Allobar" gives us a new novel of the Nigerian Palm Oil Beaches

that was as tricky as it was punctilious and precise.

Beyond these simple facts, sufficient to establish his name and personality, Randolph was a mystery. A harmless and inconsequent mystery perhaps, yet a mystery that annoyed Harth as much as it seemed to amuse Kingdon. Consequently, since Randolph had apparently "gone off" again, Harth thought it would be interesting to discover how a young man of Randolph's sort would react to a really good wallop on the jaw.

Harth had a suspicion that Randolph would be likely to react with a nastily fast display of two-handed pugilism that would make the evening warmly interesting for both of them. Those almost girlish, blue eyed young men who voluntarily removed themselves from home and the assuring protection of city policemen and corporation lighting systems, so that they might break well established rules of trading factory procedure to go prowling along ink-black African bush paths and into seamy native villages after bedtime, were not to be trusted in their acceptance of hooks, righteous or otherwise.

Presently Harth turned from the rail and entered a room almost immediately behind him. The stand lamp in this room was turned low, and on the mosquito curtained bed there lay the long rangy figure of a younger man than Harth; a man who tossed restlessly in feverish slumber and

swore like a gin tank skipper at the things he saw in his sleep.

This man's name was Balloch. He was the company's beach clerk; and Harth, who was yet a bigger man, up and around, with a fat moon face and a flaming red head, bent over Balloch and talked to him in a low persuasive voice for a little while; and thereafter began to whistle soft, tremulous bird calls that actually seemed to beat down the muttering stream of profanity until Balloch's arms stopped threshing about and his breathing became regular and quiet.

Harth continued to whistle, but his ears were alert for Randolph's return from—well, from wherever he had gone. Harth did not know where Randolph had gone. Nobody did.

Even Randolph, himself, was not very sure he was in the right hut. Only that he was in the right village. The village of Allora.

THE SOUND of some one breathing thickly and stertorously in his sleep, the whimpering cry of a wakeful infant, the sniffing investigations of a perpetually hungry bush dog, the low crooning hum of a voice that belonged to a shadow-like human hovering over a dying fire in the middle of a clearing, and the heavy stench of un-Christianlike odors that filled sensitive nostrils to the point of suffocation—none of this seemed to interfere with the apparently purposeful intentions of the young man who was known to Kingdon, Harth and Balloch, and to Warri in general, as John Randolph.

That he had managed to get into this particular village and hut without let or hindrance was remarkable enough in itself. That he would get out of it with his life would be still more remarkable. But he seemed to know exactly what he was about and his knowledge of the floor plan of native dwellings in that remote part of the world appeared to be sufficient for his purpose; also, the swift and soundless character of his movements gave every indication of a body and mind and nervous system that were alert to every slightest twist or turn that fate could take.

Native mats, hung from ceiling to floor, were, for the greater part, the only partitions that divided this oblong mud and thatch bit of architecture into "rooms". And just what possibilities lay beyond each partition of mats Randolph, quite obviously, did not know. But he seemed unusually willing to take a chance to find out.

Softly, soundlessly he moved, the slender, darting light of a small pocket flashlight most cautiously leading the way past sprawling figures that lay starkly asleep upon floor mats; a snoring discordant chorus that would have rasped the nerves of any one who was not concentrating upon a very definite mission that had some real purpose behind it.

Randolph was nothing if not purposeful and his childlike blue eyes darted hither and thither in search of something or other that, quite evidently, meant much to him.

Apparently he was not looking for anything human or animate. Lithe, slender daughters or wives of this house, whether curled up on luxurious, mosquito curtained camp cots or lying in almost nude simplicity upon mats and cushions on the floor of one of the inner rooms, meant just as little to Randolph as the snoring masculine hulks that slept in outer darkness.

But the possessions of those girls—their corals, their beads, their hiding places for the things that adorned their bodies—Randolph's childlike blue eyes seemed to follow his little flashlight in the hungry pursuit of things that glittered; and when he came upon a small metal box that looked as if it might contain something really interesting, he pounced upon it and opened it with an eagerness that took no thought at all of the slim bronze Venus who slept within a foot of where he stood.

Then it was that the flashlight decided to go wrong. Its light went out sharply and without warning and apparently intended to stay out. Randolph said something under his breath, tried to shake the flashlight into life, listened a moment or

two, shook the flashlight again and again, then decided to put down the metal box so that he could try to make an adjustment of the battery—an adjustment that needed the use of both hands.

Carefully he bent down to lay the box upon the mat covered, bench-like piece of ironwood furniture on which he had found it; and even more suddenly than it had gone wrong, the flashlight decided to become all right again.

A sharp, stabbing ray of light struck the sleeping girl at his feet full in the eyes.

"Damn!"

"*Cha!*"

And then—

A metal box spilling trinkets and trash upon bench and floor; a vague, wraith-like figure leaping through a window hole and bearing with him a light that sprang at the dark like the thrust of a knife; the piercing scream of a Jakri girl who was sure she had become possessed of devils and was seeing things that were sent to torment her soul by the gods of the Little Black Well; answering feminine screams, thick, hoarse masculine gutturals of inquiry and anger, the patter of naked feet rushing from every conceivable direction at once—all of this crowding in upon a spilled box of trinkets and demanding an explanation for it all.

Perhaps the gods of the Little Black Well of Allora could make this explanation. Perhaps the Pool of Crocodiles beyond Saganna.

The village of Allora did not know; and not even Randolph, tearing along a bush path at the imminent risk of his neck, was sufficiently well informed to tell more than one half of the story.

The other half . . .

CHAPTER II

THE AMAZING MR. RANDOLPH

IN SPITE of himself, Harth liked the way Randolph came up the front stairs on his return from these nocturnal prowlings of his. There was no deceit in the youth; little or no effort at trying to escape the just censure of his superiors.

This time, however, he looked as if he would like to avoid Harth for a little while; at least long enough to make a presentable appearance at the bar of justice.

"I'll be with you in a minute," he said to Harth who met him at the head of the stairs. "I'd like to wash up if you don't mind."

Harth grunted. He could see that Randolph had had a rougher time than usual. His trousers were torn in at least two places and one sleeve of his shirt hung limply from the shoulder as if some one or something had tried to prevent him from getting back to his job in the Marsden & Company kernel store. His face was dirty, too, and this was most unusual for Randolph, who seemed to have a gift for keeping his cherubic face clean under any and every circumstance.

"I'll give you five minutes," Harth conceded generously, and they moved along the veranda together. "You're going to do hospital duty for the balance of the night, so you might as well make a clean start."

Randolph said nothing then, but when he reappeared looking most irritatingly clean in spotless white drill, he asked—

"Did you say hospital duty?"

"Balloch's temperature needs watching," Harth said curtly, "and you're going to watch it. If he shows signs of getting any worse—"

"Wouldn't he be better off in that hospital on the government beach? That's what it's for, isn't it? Or is it just a kind of doll's house for the doctor to play around in?"

Harth did not answer directly and he seemed to be paying more attention to the swinging light of a hurricane lantern in the hands of a watchboy who was ambling along the waterfront, than to Randolph's chin.

"We don't let our men go to hospital until the doctor sends a stretcher and a squad of Yoruba soldier men to get 'em," he said presently. "Just go into Balloch's

room and sit there. That should be simple enough."

"Quite," Randolph agreed and dabbed at his forehead and upper lip lightly with his handkerchief. "Unfortunately I know nothing of nursing and am afraid I'd only be in the way. Better send for a hospital orderly or some one of the sort. I've had a rather trying day of it doing Balloch's work and my own and hardly feel equal to—"

The blond head shifted ever so slightly and Harth's right arm, carrying many pounds pressure of righteousness, swished harmlessly past Randolph's smooth shaven chin; harmlessly, that is, as far as Randolph was concerned. Harth almost lost the arm in the effort he made, and his equilibrium, in the succeeding second or two, was not worth a *bicuba*, which is worth just three copper pennies.

"Don't do that," Randolph said as Harth floundered against the leg rest of a deck chair. "Don't ever do that. It's much too hot for barroom tactics of that sort and I'd only get into trouble with Kingdon and the home office if I knocked your silly head about. They'd call it mutiny, I suppose, even though the real truth of the matter would be that you are a rotten boxer."

Randolph paused, but Harth did not interpose a syllable. He knew there was more of it and that it probably would be very interesting.

"Please understand," Randolph resumed and leaned a shoulder against a veranda upright, "I don't mind you being the senior assistant and fat and red headed. I don't mind your whistling or your singing or the fizzy drink noises you make to amuse your friends; in fact, I don't mind anything about you except your foolish notions about yourself as a boxer or fighter or whatever it is along those lines you think you are. If you must establish your authority after that fashion, come up behind me and use a *machete* or a club. I've been anticipating that misspent right for at least a month."

Harth was not pale with fury. Neither was he crimson with shame. He had completely established his equilibrium and he now stood looking at Randolph quizzically, as at a new but not too interesting species. Presently he said:

"I think you're bluffing, and some evening I shall probably call your bluff. If you fight the way you talk, you're pretty clever and your best punch should be a waspish jab. But I don't think you can hit worth a damn."

"Of course not," Randolph agreed pleasantly. "Hard hitting is too rough on the hands and I don't really know very much about boxing from a professional standpoint. But I do know the theory; enough, at least, to protect myself against your wide and wallowing style of hitting. You must waste a terrific lot of energy punching holes in the atmosphere."

HARTH glanced in the direction of Balloch's room, listened a moment, then brought his attention back to Randolph, who was no longer leaning against the veranda upright.

"I think I can trust Balloch to sleep for a little while," he said mildly. "I am sorry he must miss this because he would appreciate it so much. Might I request the pleasure of your company as far as the powder house? There is a spot in that vicinity that is flat and isolated and—"

"Don't talk rot. You can't fight and I'm not going to walk all the way to the powder house just to wallop you on the nose. I can do that much for you right here."

And Harth had a befogged sort of notion that Randolph did. As he struggled to extricate himself from the sagging embrace of the deck chair in which he had, all involuntarily, seated himself, he was not really sure about it. He seemed to have been hit in so many places at the same time that he did not know whether his nose had been omitted as a target or not.

Perhaps it was Randolph's footwork that was so fast and elusive; perhaps it was that odd sidewise sway of his body as he came in, and then again it may have

been that puzzlingly extended right that did not seem to do anything at all except —well, except keep his, Harth's, face in position for Randolph's left to punch. But one hand could never hit so many times and places in such a short space of time. Harth was sure of this much; and of course, it was a gallery performance, exhibiting just about everything Randolph had in his bag of boxing tricks.

"Don't get up," Randolph advised. "That's not a bad chair and if you keep on getting up and sitting down in it again suddenly like that it will go to pieces in no time. Better stay where you are and have your boy bring you a gin and bitters."

Harth paused. His head was clear enough, there was no real damage done, and he knew he had to hit Randolph just once—just once that was all—just—

When Harth opened his eyes he was stretched out on the floor of his own room with a pillow under his head, and Randolph was bending over him, bathing his face and forehead with Florida water.

"You'll be all right in a minute," Randolph said encouragingly. "Much sooner than my hands. What the devil is your jaw made of anyway?"

Harth did not say. The jaw to which Randolph so familiarly referred was numb, and Harth had a vague idea that he had tried to hit Randolph just once and had run his jaw into a riveter's hammer instead. He wondered if even Balloch could hit— But Balloch was sick and Kingdon had said—

"Never mind slopping that stuff all over my face. Go in and take a look at Balloch. See if he's all right."

"I did and he is. Lie still. The world hasn't gone all to the little doggies simply because you've been out of it for ten minutes or so."

"Ten—what?"

Randolph consulted his wrist watch.

"You went out at 9:13 and it is now 9:32. I dragged you in here out of sight and would have put you to bed only I'm no weight lifter. Is the pillow comfortable?"

Harth lay quite still. Further comment was superfluous and any further action— He glanced up at Randolph who had obediently stopped using the Florida water and was squatting beside him with his legs folded under him like a tailor.

"Anybody ever lick you?"

"Certainly."

"How long ago?"

"Well, not since I learned to pick them with some discretion."

Harth grinned slowly. It was interesting to know that he had been chosen with discretion. Then, after a short pause—

"Do you like to fight?"

"Not particularly."

"Why?"

"It's too rough on the hands and too much trouble bringing them back to life afterward."

AT THIS juncture Harth seemed to lose all interest in cross-examination. Also, disdaining any assistance, he clambered to his feet, reached a chair beside the battered deal table that served him as a writing desk and sat down. His head still sang and when he had lighted a cigaret, he found that holding it between his lips was quite an effort. The lower half of his face seemed to have been shaken from its moorings, and he knew he would not whistle with any comfort or success for quite awhile.

Randolph also had risen and was standing a few paces from Harth's chair, watching him. The childlike blue eyes had a childlike look of real concern in them.

"Coming round all right?"

Harth nodded dully.

"Call the chief steward and get him to put more blankets on Balloch's bed. Tell him to have Balloch's boy prepare a hot lime drink and when the drink is ready let me know. I'll have to wake Balloch to feed him more phenacetin to make him sweat."

"Better lie down awhile and let me take care of him," Randolph suggested mildly. "He takes the phenacetin first and follows it with the lime drink, doesn't he? Ten grains?"

"That'll be enough this trip." Harth shook his head to try to clear it. "And if he wakes up cussing, don't pay any attention to him unless you feel the need of a lesson in fluent profanity. Got any phenacetin?"

"I'll find some," Randolph said, and went quietly out.

Harth remained where he was, listening to the singing sounds inside his head, and tried to ignore the dull heaviness that held him in a nauseous grip. Of course, he was not as young as he used to be and this damnable climate had slowed him up, while the daily round of quinine and canned food had played ducks and drakes with his teeth and his stomach. He couldn't fight as he used to do, couldn't eat as he used to do, couldn't drink . . .

His house boy appeared silently at his elbow, heralded only by the slightest tinkle of glasses upon a tray. One glass contained a stiff tot of brandy, the other a chaser of water.

"Mas' Rando'f say for me to bring um," the boy announced.

Harth grunted, picked up the glass containing the brandy and emptied it at a gulp, then glanced curiously at the other glass on the tray as if he wondered why it was there. He waved the boy away and, depositing his cigaret in an ash tray, passed out of the room and wrapped an arm around one of the veranda uprights. Then he just stood there looking absently at the uncertain lights of the African Merchants Company shining through the palms and mango trees across the little side creek.

There was no doubt about the fact that Randolph was a surprising young man. Very. And just why he had come out to that fever ridden country to sweat his young life away was not any too simple to understand.

Generally speaking, first-timers in the palm oil trade were just normal humans with a dash of the unexpected and the unorthodox in their makeup; young men who had struggled to belong to their former environment and had finally broken away from it for any one of a thousand reasons or for no reason at all. They drank a little or a lot, cussed as a matter of course or necessity and raised their own individual brand of hell at prescribed intervals just to assure themselves that even the climate of the White Man's Grave could not take all the zest out of life.

Randolph was not at all like this. He was nice. He had been out from home for six months and he was still nice. He did not drink, he did not swear and, as yet, he had not made the slightest disturbance. Even in his most recent fistic exhibition he had not allowed the tonal level of the pugilistic symphony to rise above a modest pianissimo; and his investigations into the private lives of the Delta natives, when the lights were out, had been conducted so quietly and so unobtrusively that no one had known anything about them until quite recently.

Altogether a most surprising young man; much more unexpected and unorthodox than any contemporary of whom Harth could think at the moment.

It was Harth's experience that exceptional first-timers generally lived to regret it, and since Randolph was most exceptional . . .

"I fixed him up all right," Randolph's voice said softly at Harth's elbow, and Harth spun about as if he had been shot or was afraid he would be. "What's wrong? Did I startle you? I'm sorry."

Harth glanced down at Randolph's shoes and found that they were not rubber soled, then up into Randolph's face again to discover that it was expressing what seemed to be a perfectly genuine regret.

"Did you learn to do that before you came out here?" Harth asked. "Or have you acquired it since you began visiting the native villages at night?"

Randolph's brows lowered just a little. The faintest shadow clouded his child-like blue eyes.

"Balloch dropped off to sleep again as soon as he swallowed the lime drink," he said simply enough. "And I didn't want to wake him. I'm sorry I startled you."

Harth grunted. Randolph was too ex-

ceptional to be taken at his face value, particularly when he apologized. First-timers who could hit as he did did not have to apologize for anything.

"Kingdon's gone down to Forcados," Harth announced abruptly. "He'll be back tomorrow night. What are you going to tell him when he calls you into his office and gives you hell for sneaking away from the beach after everybody's in bed?"

Randolph eyed Harth quietly and calmly and without prejudice.

"Is that a tip or are you just looking for information?"

"Both. If you're not a fool, you'll tell Kingdon the truth and you might as well get some practise by spinning the yarn to me. I'll tell you whether Kingdon will swallow it or not."

Randolph smiled.

"If I find it necessary to tell Kingdon anything, I'll tell him the truth. It's perfectly simple. Will that be all right?"

"It'll be all right if it is the truth, no matter what it is. But it'll be all wrong if it's a lie, because you can't fool that little man, and he doesn't like an assistant to lie to him. Do I have to become explicit and tell you that he's the whitest human you've ever met and that he is to be treated accordingly?"

Randolph just leaned over the rail and looked steadily down at the beach below.

"Funny how people will get the wrong impression of things," he said after awhile. "See that water tank over there—the one at the corner of the general warehouse?"

Harth did not have to look.

"Well, what of it?"

"I've been seeing that thing for six months and I always thought it was a square tank, like most of the others around the beach. But it's round. Or it seems to be in this light. Is it a round tank?"

Harth did not bother to look at the tank. Randolph's expression of childlike inquiry was much more interesting.

"If the story you are going to tell Kingdon isn't a better one than that," Harth said dryly, "you had better preserve a profound and discreet silence."

"Perhaps it is just the effect of shadow that makes it seem round," Randolph suggested. "Or is there something hanging over one corner of it giving it the appearance of roundness? Is it really a round tank?"

Harth turned his attention slowly and skeptically in the direction of the tank. He knew it was a square tank. It always had been a square tank and square tanks did not become round—round? Or something hanging over one corner . . .

"Hunh!" A peering, questioning glance and a pause. "Let's go down and see."

THEY passed downstairs to the beach and Harth led the way to the tank that was under suspicion, his aching jaw, his burdensome years and his temperamental stomach temporarily forgotten. However, ere they had covered ten yards, the tank decided to become square again.

A lurking figure in a loin cloth that had been hugging the shadow of the water tank and possibly had allowed himself to overlap a corner of it suddenly took all of the tank's apparent roundness away with him in a streaking rush toward the nearest and safest exit. This exit was the little side creek that separated Marsden & Company's beach from that of the African Merchants' Trading Company, and an almost inaudible splash was all the trace the intruder left behind him. Even before Randolph, who moved as fast as the black, reached the mangrove stick breakwater, the ripples on the creek's sullen, uncommunicative face were scarcely discernible in the dark.

"Probably swimming under water," Harth said glumly. "No use trying to follow him."

"No—" doubtfully. "I suppose not. Wonder what he was after?"

"Something that doesn't belong to him. You can bet on that. And he'll come back as often as he has to till he gets it—or we catch him."

"I see." Randolph followed Harth with apparent reluctance away from the creek side. They were climbing the

stairs again when he asked casually—

"And what happens if we catch him?"

"He will become a member of the select chain gang club you see in session on the government beach when there is a freighter alongside the wharf. In other words, he becomes desperately unhappy for a few months, dragging a lot of other people around with him when he goes to work."

Harth's voice had trailed off to a whisper and he stopped suddenly on the top step and glanced sharply along the house veranda toward Kingdon's end of it. The bull-like rush he made, in the general direction of Kingdon's office-living room took Randolph completely by surprise. Nevertheless, the junior assistant was at Harth's elbow when the latter reached the veranda rail that fronted the river.

Consequently, they both saw the same thing at the same time; a squat, black blob of humanity with long, ape-like arms, drop from the veranda lightly to the ground below and, with barely a pause, efface himself behind a clump of cactus and a lime hedge that screened his escape toward the river.

Harth managed to grab Randolph around the waist before the junior assistant had gone more than halfway over the the veranda rail.

"Don't be a damned fool. He's in the river by this time and his pal and he will join hands where their canoe is tied up. Let's see if the short fellow swiped anything."

As nearly as they could judge, the short fellow had not as yet taken anything that did not belong to him, and when Harth had looked around Kingdon's office again and yet again, he grunted.

"Hunh. They were coming at whatever they wanted from two sides. Wonder what the attraction is? And why?"

Randolph looked across the little side creek in the general direction of the dim lights of the African Merchants' Company, and his childlike blue eyes had a glint in them that shifted restlessly.

"I wonder."

CHAPTER III

THE OLD ORDER AND THE NEW

THE MARSDEN launch, carrying Kingdon to Forcados, approached Atba Creek with caution. The spot was narrow and black enough in the daylight. At night the curtain of mangroves that hung all about it seemed to crowd in upon the place and invest it with a sinister and impenetrable gloom. Many things that were sordid and unwritten had been done under cover of that dark. Bad debts had been collected and paid in full, and the nasty crunch of a *machete* upon an unsuspecting skull had been all the receipt that had been given or expected.

Kingdon was lolling upon the bench in the launch's little cabin and was leaving the luck of the night to Jonah, the colored engineer, who was generally reputed to have no luck at all. Kingdon was the agent for Marsden & Company at Warri, and the majority of men, when they met him for the first time, looked down upon him. They did this, literally and figuratively, because his inches were few and his manner subdued and unassuming. The second or third time they happened to encounter him, whether in the pursuit of business, pleasure or just plain trouble, the chances were fairly even that they would be looking up before the meeting was over.

In the mangrove swamps of the Lower Niger River, where Kingdon bartered his health and miscellaneous goods for palm oil and rubber and the kernel of the palm nut, it was said of him that he feared nothing under heaven. This was at once the reward and the price of fame; for, as Kingdon himself would have been the first to aver, the statement was just so much tommyrot.

Every man is afraid of something; most of them of many things. Kingdon, who had earned an enviable reputation for fearlessness in the gentlest, most pacific sort of way, knew this. He knew that fear was man's inescapable heritage, and that whatever else a man might be born

without he was never born without his quota of fear.

Just at the moment, however, he was not giving much thought to philosophy. He was thinking about prices—the price of palm oil in particular—and because of a sudden and all too suspicious rise in price in the local markets, and the still more suspicious devices of the African Merchants' Company, his nearest neighbor and trickiest competitor, he was on his way to Forcados to have breakfast on the *Kameroon* with Alphabet Colton, the agent-general of Marsden & Company. He hoped that Colton, who was going home on leave, would be in an appropriately good humor to give him the authority he wanted as a substitute for the bluff he was making ready to use.

The tactics of the African Merchants' Company, particularly since the arrival of their latest agent, had been suspicious in the extreme. And although this company had undergone so many different changes of front in the past decade, it was still something of a shock to Kingdon to find himself accusing the African Merchants' Company of illegitimate practises.

For the African Merchants' Company was synonymous with the name of MacBeth, and the name of MacBeth, in West African trade, held a niche all its own.

In the days of Kingdon's earliest acquaintance with the Oil Rivers, the height of a trading assistant's ambition had been to emulate the MacBeth example by starting a business on nothing but nerve and sand, and thereafter heave it up to the heights with the help of sheer daring and a bountiful gift for doing the surprising thing.

The Unusual MacBeths had been so unusual while they lived that, in the years since their death, they had become unreal. The stories that had been told about them had acquired the flavor of myths and few newcomers believed the truth of them.

The speed the launch was making just then did not intrude upon Kingdon's reminiscent humor and he knew, without even a glance of inquiry, that Jonah was passing Atba Creek and was making doubly sure that nothing that was human would be allowed to interfere with their arrival at Forcados in good time for breakfast.

The launch's searchlight was probing the dark with an inquisitive glare and since it revealed nothing more formidable than a two-paddle canoe swaying in the mouth of Atba Creek, Jonah cautiously increased the boat's speed. He swung wider of the canoe than was necessary and straightway lunged away from that plague-spot almost as if he were afraid it might follow him. The squeaky siren squeaked a little louder as Jonah swept around the curve immediately beyond Atba Creek, and there was a glint in the black engineer's eyes that was almost akin to triumph.

THIS look lived but a moment. The next, the whites of Jonah's eyes gleamed wide then seemed to roll right into the top of his head. He pulled the wheel hard over, his lips moving rapidly in a silent incantation of his own composing, and the sudden answering lurch of the launch flung Kingdon unceremoniously from the bench to the deck of the little cabin.

Principally because he knew Jonah, he stayed there; and the shout of an excited Kroo boy, followed immediately by a crackling, shivering thump, was no surprise to Kingdon either before or after his breath came back to him. He knew from experience that Jonah had escaped a greater disaster by choosing a lesser, and he knew also that the launch's nose was now buried deep in black and oily Niger mud. There was nothing new in this. Kingdon had a suspicion that mud and Jonah were blood relatives from away back, and if a mud bank was the worst of their troubles, he could still have breakfast with Colton on the *Kameroon*.

Presently, after a minute or so of waiting to be quite sure the launch had stopped bumping into things, Kingdon came to his feet and climbed the trifling companion stairs leading to the deck above.

A mantle of overhanging mangroves smothered the launch from stem to stern

so that it was difficult to see anything at all distinctly at first. But after awhile, with the help of Jonah and a Kroo boy, Kingdon gathered that the launch had avoided a stranded low draft freighter by plunging into the river's bank as far as the mud and the mangrove roots would allow. The searchlight was out, the engine had gone dead, and another Kroo boy, vaguely discernible in the darkness beyond the skylight of the little cabin, was babbling in monotonous repetition about a leak.

"I never see dat freight boat, sah," Jonah said woefully. "I never see um. I no *savez* wha's mattah wif dat freight boat, sah. He no catch whistle and he no catch bell. I no *savez*—"

"All right, Jonah. Never mind that now. See if that Kroo boy's right about a leak forward and get your searchlight working if you can." He turned to the nearest Kroo boy. "Fetch lantern. I want to go look canoe."

"Canoe be all right, sah. I look um, sah."

"Fine. Fetch lantern and we go look freight boat."

"Yessah."

The canoe was intended to accommodate four paddles, but Kingdon had to be content with two paddle boys in this emergency; and in a minute or two he was balancing himself in the prow, getting his feet wet, while he held a hurricane lantern aloft and peered at the black sides of the low draft freighter which seemed to have discovered an uncharted mud bank. At least, such was Kingdon's first impression. Then, as he drew nearer, he saw that the freighter, almost broadside on to the current, when Jonah had encountered it, was veering upstream, and was apparently proceeding on its way just as if nothing had happened.

This did not suit Kingdon at all. He did not yet know just how culpable the freighter had been in the matter of any damage that the launch had sustained. But he did know that Lloyd's insurance was just as good on the Warri River as it was on the Mersey or the Thames, and the identity of the grubby little freighter was an essential bit of information that Lloyd's agent in Warri would want.

Kingdon wanted to know, in any event, what sort of skipper, black, white or in between, had strung his boat across a narrow creek like that in the black of night and, having almost wrecked a launch and endangered the lives of every one on board, was apparently not making the slightest move or sound to inquire if any one had been hurt or killed. So he waved the lantern, cupped his hand to his mouth and shouted:

"Hello! Branch boat! Ahoy!"

There was no answer. If the boat were a branch boat—meaning a freighter of very low draft, normally plying across the tricky Lagos sandbar—she maintained a silence that was as impolite as it was mysterious; particularly when such mysterious discourtesy was tendered so close to Atba Creek.

Kingdon shouted again and again with the same lack of result, then had his paddle boys run the canoe alongside the slowly veering vessel, which, upon closer inspection, proved to be distinctly of the branch boat type. This, in itself, was against her, for there was nothing grubbier or less desirable in West African shipping than the average branch boat.

She hung low in the water, her lower decks scarcely higher than a six-footer's head, and the stubby rope ladder that hung overside was a bit of luck that Kingdon had not expected—had anticipated having to get along without. However, instructing one of his Kroo boys to remain in the canoe and stay alongside, he ordered the other to follow him and accepted the assistance of the rope ladder without quibble or question.

Kingdon's physical attributes were trifling and he carried no arms of any sort. But that he was doing either a courageous or a foolhardy thing did not even occur to him for a moment. It did, however, occur to the Kroo boy who was twice his size and many more times muscularly capable in a brawl of any sort. As Kingdon dropped lightly from the rail to the deck

he could distinctly hear the Kroo boy's teeth chatter.

THE BOAT was surely a branch boat, or it had been one, and Kingdon had crossed the Lagos sandbar often enough to find his way around a branch boat's decks blindfolded. A black oiler, squatting in the engine room companion, almost directly opposite the spot where the rope ladder hung, was the first sign of life Kingdon encountered.

"Where cap'n?" he asked the oiler mildly.

A noncommittal grunt was the only answer he got, and a moment later the oiler vanished into the squat bowels of the boat. So Kingdon headed directly for the bridge and the normal location of the captain's cabin. There was a shadow-like figure on the bridge and there were other vague and sinister appearing figures moving with barefooted scuff across the decks in various aimless directions, but Kingdon paid no attention to those. If there were a light in the captain's cubby hole of a cabin— There was a light there. The door was open and the smoky light of an oil lamp in a bracket glowed dimly.

Kingdon paused.

His first thought, of course, was that the thing was impossible, that he was not really seeing what his sense of sight told him was reality and not a picture in a frame with a smoky lamp above. Then he thought of the kind of artists who like to depict beauty shining through murky shadows, with sharp, yet velvet-soft light effects lifting the subject into starkly beautiful relief against its background of somber browns and blacks. Finally he realized that he was staring at her and that she was staring at him, and that both of them were wondering where the other had come from.

Kingdon's surprise was the greater, of course. He was a man and there was nothing exceptional about the presence of any kind of man on a branch boat. But a white woman at that time and place . . . There was probably no precedent for it in the annals of the Oil Rivers.

She was seated upon a little cabin trunk just inside the half-open door, and some one inside the cabin had been talking to her; some one Kingdon could not see. Now, there was silence inside the cabin and out, and the girl, whose face was the whitest and whose eyes and hair were quite the blackest Kingdon had ever seen, was waiting for him to speak.

"I beg your pardon," he said at last. "I am Kingdon of Marsden & Company and I am looking for the captain. Is he inside?"

"No. The captain he is on the bridge. Only I am here."

This, as Kingdon knew, was a lie and, on the surface of things, he saw no necessity for it. But, at the moment, he was perhaps more interested in the fact that the girl's accent had a hint of Spanish in it.

"Thank you," he acknowledged simply. "My launch has come to grief in the mud and—"

"Oh, the launch. Your launch, señor? I am so sorry. I have not the words—you will please to pardon— Oh, I hope so much no one is hurt."

"It is perfectly all right," Kingdon said, and wondered how she managed to speak with so sincere an intonation and so dull an expression. Her tongue seemed to say what she wanted it to say, but her eyes told him it was an honest effect dishonestly arrived at. "I'll talk to the captain. Perhaps he can help me."

"Yes, yes; surely—the captain. But you will please to pardon jus' the same? It is miracle if no one is hurt or is not dead. I am glad."

She smiled, a slight, pallid little smile that seemed to come from out of a memory of many unsmiling days—perhaps years; and it was then that Kingdon became aware of the fact that she was wearing a black and silver Japanese kimono that, of course, emphasized the decidedly exotic impression she gave.

Kingdon bowed gravely and, with some reluctance, turned in the direction of the bridge and spoke up to the heavy, shadow-like figure that loomed more distinctly into view at his approach.

"Are you the skipper?" he asked. "What do you want?"

The voice was thick and surly and did not in the least encourage conversation. The alcoholic note in it was most unpleasantly marked.

"My launch is in trouble," Kingdon said simply. "And I thought, if you have finally decided which way you are going, you might very easily be able to help me out."

"I'm going up," the skipper grunted as if he were making a concession in admitting this much.

"Really? That's fine. And it will help me out a lot because I am going down. So if you expect to describe any more circles in these creeks, it will be all right as far as I am concerned. You are quite sure you are going up?"

"Who in hell are you?"

"Kingdon of Marsden's," the little man returned politely. "And might I ask—"

"Kingdon, eh?" The thick voice on the bridge seemed to lose some of its confidence and for a moment there was silence, followed by a most uncertain laugh. "Hunh. You're the little fellah that stopped the war on the Akerri road, ain't you? No size but all guts. Pleased to meet you, I'm sure."

"The pleasure might be mutual if I knew who you were."

"Oh, I'll get along all right without givin' you any pleasure. Get to hell out of here before I have the niggers throw you into the ditch."

Kingdon laughed, a low, soft sound that was clear and genuine. He moved toward the rope ladder, followed by a shivering Kroo boy who was ready to leap for the rail at less than a moment's notice.

"I like your disposition," Kingdon called up to the skipper. "It is so sincerely unpleasant. I hope you have a pleasant trip upriver—that is, if you are quite sure you are going up. You are quite sure, aren't you, Murvey?"

"Damn you—"

Kingdon laughed.

"Thanks, Murvey. Good night."

ANOTHER oath from the bridge was followed by a hesitant silence as if the man Kingdon had called Murvey was trying to make up his mind what he should do about it, if anything. The silence was broken suddenly by the light running tap of a woman's shoes upon the deck just as Kingdon was about to follow the Kroo boy over the rail.

"Wait, please. I am so sorry. So very sorry, Señor Kingdon. This so old steamer, she have trouble with engine, with—with steering wheel. Some time she go straight, some time she go twist about, some time she not go at all!"

The girl laughed, but there was no mirth in it, and Kingdon did not join her. In the flickering light of his hurricane lantern, the expression in her deep black eyes told him that she was acting under orders of some sort; possibly the orders of the man who had been talking to her in the skipper's cabin; also that she did not in the least care for the rôle she was called upon to play. Obviously she did not enjoy lying about things even when some of the truth was in them. At the same time, Kingdon thought he detected something decided and climactic in her manner that had not been visible to him when he had seen her under the brighter light of the lamp in the cabin.

"I see," he said quietly. "It is quite all right. I have Captain Murvey's word for it that he is going upriver, and I assume I can depend upon that."

The girl smiled, glanced up at the bridge, then back at Kingdon.

"You mus' not make the fun of the captain," she told him and expressively closed one eye. "He will not like you. And the people he does not like he gives to the so nasty crocodiles for dinner. I have heard him say it. He has the—the sense of humor so very polite. Is it not?"

Kingdon accepted the girl's flagrant wink and the contradictory evidence of tension that accompanied it, with an expression that could not possibly have betrayed anything to the man on the bridge,

even if Murvey could have seen, which was very doubtful.

"Yes," Kingdon agreed. "I must confess I have always liked Captain Murvey's idea of a joke. He usually cracks them with his fist or a belaying pin."

"Damn you, Kingdon! Get off my ship!"

"Certainly."

"Do not hurry ver' fast," the girl interjected in a low voice. Then, still lower, and standing close to the rail, "I am coming with you."

"Good Lord!"

"Captain Murvey is ver' nice." The girl's voice rose again for the skipper's benefit. "And I will not like him to be the joke for any man. But I am so sorry about your launch. Please to forgive and to pardon." Then, very low, and with an earnestness that could not be denied, "I must get away! I must!"

Kingdon's expression tightened and for an instant his eyes showed a perfectly natural hesitation. But only for an instant.

"I am at your service."

He inclined his head slightly, saw the quick light of hope and unbelief that leaped into her eyes, then glanced sharply up at the bridge.

"Good night again, Murvey."

A surly grunt was Murvey's only answer and Kingdon, without any further parley, swung himself over the rail and down the rope ladder into the waiting canoe. The branch boat was moving very slowly—scarcely moving at all—scraping close to the mangrove lined bank of the creek, her nose definitely pointed upriver.

Kingdon held on to the rope ladder, keeping the canoe directly under it, and in something less than thirty seconds a slim figure in a blouse and white drill trousers was climbing the rail above him. She was in the canoe at his side, with the Japanese kimono over one arm, almost before Murvey's accompanying staccato volley of oaths had a chance to get properly under way.

"Downriver—anywhere—away!" the girl whispered frantically. "Please, I must—I must get away from him. I must!"

"From Murvey?"

"No—he is nothing. It is Marsallow."

"Marsallow?"

"Yes, Marsallow. He is the devil himself!"

CHAPTER IV

SCORE ONE FOR KINGDON

KINGDON snapped an order to the startled Kroo boys, who promptly swung the canoe clear of the branch boat and her lazily turning propeller. Then, aided by the current, they spun her about and headed downstream.

There was sudden bedlam on the decks of the branch boat, Murvey's voice rising above all other voices, bellowing orders that were punctuated, as Scurvy Murvey was wont to punctuate such moments of stress, with a clutter of oaths that served only to waste time and produce a confusion of results.

Kingdon, gripping the girl's arm till she had found a seat, and thinking rather solemnly of the company in which he had found her, listened to the babble in the dark behind them and kept his eyes fixed on the murky figures that scurried hither and thither on the decks of the branch boat. None of those figures was distinct; not at first. Then, and suddenly, in the branch boat's stern, there sprang into being a towering shadow whose head seemed to climb out of sight into the blackness overhead.

"Down!"

The girl clutched Kingdon's arm and pulled him bodily down beside her. The canoe rocked dangerously and the nearest paddle boy gave vent to a hoarse guttural of fear and amazement. For, within an ace of his toes, a long thin knife quivered and hummed its message from the giant shadow in the stern of the branch boat.

"It is Marsallow! Quick! It is he! There is no one like that!"

Kingdon was inclined to believe her. He had heard the song of the knife as it had whined past his ear, and he was quite sure that the sudden rocking of the canoe had, very probably, been responsible for the point missing his neck. But he had little time for thought of any kind. The sharp staccato report of a revolver and the nasty chug of a bullet in the side of the canoe immediately behind him, gave him ample warning that the man who was called Marsallow had more than one weapon at his command.

A second bullet splashed into the water just a little to Kingdon's left, but the third, as nearly as Kingdon could distinguish, seemed to be aimed at the black roof of the night. Either Marsallow's shooting hand had been interfered with by some one who did not think so much noise advisable, or he had simply fired a third shot in the air as a militant gesture.

There was, in any event, no more shooting, and the succeeding stillness, disturbed only by the frenzied splash of the Kroo boys' paddles, was even more sinister than the uproar of a few minutes before. The girl said nothing. He knew she was trembling, but she had not cowered or whimpered when the clamor behind them had filled the dark with the voices of many devils climbing out of the bowels of the Pit. She had simply clung to his hand and arm as if she were trying to push him down into the bottom of the canoe and put herself between him and Marsallow's bullets. This was not at all in keeping with the company in which he had found her.

He had known Murvey of old—his disposition, his voice and his profanity—when Murvey, skippering better ships, had been earning the right to be called Scurvy Murvey. Now, Murvey, true to form, had sunk to the very mean level of a branch boat, and a branch boat of doubtful age and purpose at that.

Kingdon was sure the girl at his side could have nothing in common with a man of Scurvy Murvey's type. And the giant Marsallow, who was so capable with a knife and gun . . .

Kingdon stood up and looked behind him for a sign of pursuit, resting his hand on the girl's shoulder to steady himself. A curving bank of bush was shutting the branch boat out from sight and in another minute the canoe had swept around a friendly turn, and was poking its nose into the deeper darkness of a side creek.

"It's all right," Kingdon assured the girl. "This canoe is too light for anything they can float to catch us. We can lose them in these creeks in no time. You are quite safe now. Where would you like to go?"

Impulsively the girl reached up, caught the hand that rested on her shoulder and hung on.

"I—I do not know," she whispered. "And now—now I am the great coward. I am afraid. Not for myself, señor. No. For you—for those so strong black boys who are knowing not at all what they do for me. Oh, please to pardon."

"That—er—that's all right."

"But, no, señor—it is not. Now that it is done, I know it is not; and I am afraid Marsallow he will kill you all."

Kingdon discounted the idea, but with Marsallow's knife still sticking in the bottom of the canoe, he was afraid he was not very convincing. Mechanically he tried to remove his hand from the girl's shoulder so that he could mop the perspiration from his face and forehead, but the girl gripped his hand only the more tightly and whispered:

"You will please to allow me to keep your hand a little while. It is a so kind hand to me."

KINGDON tacitly consented by leaving the hand where it was, and used his handkerchief with his left. He was not accustomed, in the Niger Delta creeks or anywhere else for that matter, to having fascinatingly beautiful, young and exotic ladies plead softly with him for the privilege of holding his hand. He had never considered himself much of a Lothario, and as this was his first experience as a gallant of the sort, he was afraid the girl

had the advantage of him in this direction.

Unless he was greatly mistaken, she had much experience with cavaliers of every description; and a girl such as she was did not have to go in search of this experience. It was delivered to her door, whether she ordered it or not.

They had, of course, left Jonah and his luck and the stranded launch behind them. The Kroo paddle boys had shouted a few hoarse and very terse gutturals of explanation as they passed, but if Jonah, or the Kroo boys who were with him, had heard, they had not troubled to make any acknowledgment.

Presently, with several curves and a solid bank of bush between them and pursuit, Kingdon ordered the paddle boys to slow up. If they had to paddle all of the rest of the way to Forcados, or back to Warri, which was much nearer and seemed more advisable, they would have to conserve their energy.

With the possibility of breakfast with Colton on the *Kameroon* fast becoming a sacrificial offering on the altar of chivalry, Kingdon hoped he could commandeer the services of a larger and more comfortable canoe, and with this thought in mind he took careful stock of every craft that passed. Most of them were hugging the bush and moving leisurely upriver, and the great majority were trade canoes, laden with palm oil or palm nut kernels. Their objective was the Warri trading beaches which they would reach in plenty of time to be on hand when the beaches opened for business at six A.M.

So Kingdon hoped prayerfully, because there were at least three white women in Warri, that he would encounter one of his own traders who was traveling in a canoe with a deck and an awning. For awhile, however, he felt that Jonah's luck had followed him. Never had he seen so many oil canoes—cumbersome dugouts that were slow of movement and utterly lacking in accommodation for any one but the paddle boys; and the kernel canoes that passed were kernel canoes and nothing more than this.

Always keeping a sharp lookout behind him for anything that seemed to be even slightly in a hurry, Kingdon said to the girl quietly:

"I think we will try to reach Warri. Will that be all right?"

"Warri? I do not know this Warri. Will you and these so strong black boys be safe in that place?"

"Oh, quite. And so will you. You are not so much afraid now, are you?"

"No-no—not so ver' much," the girl said, but gripped his hand a little tighter just the same. "But please to understand, señor, I am not afraid for me. No. Marsallow he will not kill *me*. Not at all. He is too clever—too wise to kill the thing that is to him of ver' much use. But you, señor—you will have the ver' great care? Please! For you do not know this Marsallow. He has not the heart nor the soul. He has not the fear at all. He is ice. He is the devil."

She paused and looked up at Kingdon to be quite sure she was not being so earnestly emphatic in vain. Her deep black eyes seemed to be trying desperately to impress him with the fact that he must not underestimate the situation or the man.

"He will hate you for the thing you have do for me. He will hate you so ver' much and hurt you and—oh, I am the coward to permit you! Do you see?"

"I think so," Kingdon said simply, and tried to make it assuring. "But you must not worry about it. I imagine this man Marsallow can be taken care of at the proper time."

The girl did her best to look hopeful, then glanced dubiously about as if in search of some assurance, other than Kingdon's word, for the lack of necessity for worry. And certainly the hour, their situation and the accompanying geography did not contribute even a hint of anything in the shape of a vote of confidence.

The black and narrow bush bound creeks, winding hither and yon in an endless maze of mystery and gloom, lent themselves to all that was Satanic and fearsome—to everything, in short, she had

said Marsallow represented. Here in this dank and somber graveyard of so many hopes and dreams, where sweat and blood and tears had flowed so steadily down the scarred and wrinkled cheeks of the great Mother Niger, men of Marsallow's type were at home. It was the playground of the devil and all his angels, and the girl was quite sure Marsallow was a blood brother to the prince of darkness if not actually the prince himself.

So when she looked again at Kingdon there was no misunderstanding what she thought. However much of a match for Marsallow he might be in courage and in mind, he was certainly no match for him physically. Just not at all. She was not in any sense looking down upon Kingdon when she thought this, any more than she had ever looked up to Marsallow. But inches were inches and Marsallow—*Madre Dios!*

SUDDENLY Kingdon's hand upon her shoulder took a firmer grip.

"Listen!"

"What is it?" she whispered.

"Don't you hear it?"

The girl listened a moment.

"It is—singing. Ver' queer. Like—like a chant that have not the much music?"

"Exactly. It is Lori Egba's forty-paddle canoe, or else I am very much mistaken. Egba-town is very near here and Lori is probably making for home in a very good humor, or he would not allow his boys to sing at this time of night. He is a very circumspect citizen, is Lori Egba."

"You mean he is a good man?"

"A very good man," Kingdon said simply. "Few men, white or black, are good in the sense that Chief Lori Egba is good. He has power and he has never been known to abuse it. He has wealth in abundance and he is as simple as a black iron cooking pot. And though he is perhaps the biggest trader hereabout, not even his worst enemy can say that Lori Egba ever underfed a paddle boy or hurt a competitor to gain an advantage for himself."

The girl was looking steadily up into Kingdon's face and her expression held a decided light of admiration.

"You like this man, this black chief? He is your ver' good friend?"

"Yes, I am glad to say he is."

"And you are loyal to your friends? Even to this black man?"

"I hope so. But not any more loyal than Lori Egba would be to me."

"No?"

"I'm sure of it. You are quite safe now and we'll travel to Warri or Forcados or anywhere you want to go in comfort. Perhaps you would prefer to go to Forcados and take passage home on the *Kameroon?* She sails tomorrow, you know."

The girl shook her head.

"No—please! Not the *Kameroon.* I have reason. Please to take me to this Warri."

"Surely."

Her grip upon his hand tightened, and in her impulsive Latin way she pressed it suddenly to her lips. Then, quite unabashed, her great dark eyes glistening with unbidden tears, she was looking up at him again and saying hurriedly:

"Oh, señor, you are the so true gentleman. You do not ask the question; you do not say the 'perhaps' or the 'if' or the 'no' to me. Not at all. You do not even ask what is my name! You say—oh, so beautiful—'I am at your service.' And it is so kind, so ver' wonderful to me, it is not to believe!"

Kingdon laughed and tried to release his hand as the ghostlike shape of Lori Egba's canoe swept, forty paddles strong, into sight around a curve. The girl's impulsive burst of gratitude was understandable enough. She was young, Spanish, and alone; and probably as a result of great mental strain she was on the verge of hysteria. But as he waved the hurricane lantern with his free hand as a signal to the approaching canoe to stop, he hoped she would not be quite so demonstrative before Lori Egba and his wives, if he happened to have any of them with him.

He knew he could trust Lori and his paddle boys, even though there were forty of them; but the wife or the wives of a man were no different in the Niger Delta from those in West Kensington or Murray Hill. Then, somewhat to his surprise and as if she read his thoughts to the letter, the girl released his hand and said:

"It is all right. I will behave so quiet—so like the lady—no one will think anything is wrong. And I will wear this kimono. See?"

"Better wait till we get into Lori's canoe," Kingdon advised as the huge craft drew alongside. "Are your feet very wet?"

The girl shook her head.

"Not so much. It is nothing. I have not the cold feet now so much either." She laughed. "Perhaps your friend, this chief, he will be my friend, too?"

"Surely."

"And you will say to him Annette she is the very good girl. Please! You will call me Annette, yes? And you will say I am the very good girl?"

Kingdon smiled.

"I will call you Annette, surely, but it won't be necessary to say anything to Lori Egba about how good you are. You are with me—a friend of mine—and Lori Egba won't ask any questions or expect any explanation."

"No? No explanation at all?"

"None at all."

Annette seemed to find this very hard to believe. Then Kingdon heard her whispering incredulously:

"In one hour—in this so dark and terrible place—*two* so true gentlemen! And in all my life before—all my life—" she shivered a little—"It is not to believe."

CHAPTER V

THE BEACH

LORI EGBA'S canoe, with its forty gleaming paddles, its great grass awning and roomy, cushion covered deck amidships, finally came to a full stop. The paddle boys' chant stopped too.

Gripping the girl's arm to steady her, Kingdon held up the hurricane lantern and peered under the awning into the gentle and genial eyes of the chief who was looking out at him. Except for the company of his eldest son, Lori Egba was alone; and since the youth had evidently had too much palm wine and was fast asleep, he did not count.

"*Doh*," Lori greeted Kingdon simply, and glanced in the mildest inquiry at Annette.

"Hello, Lori. My canoe be so-so canoe and my launch catch so-so mud. You fit to help me catch Warri?"

Lori nodded.

"I glad foh dat," he said, and at once moved to assist Annette to scramble aboard.

He did not address even a syllable to her, but gave her the assurance of a steadying hand until she was seated opposite him among his cushions.

Kingdon followed, ordering his paddle boys to trail their canoe behind the chief's. Annette donned the kimono, glanced speculatively at her wet shoes, then quizzically into Lori Egba's eyes.

She saw the dark blue blazer he wore over a white silk shirt and she knew that the rich looking, colorful cloth that clothed him voluminously from waist to ankle was about the best his money could buy. But, under the green lined rim of the lightweight sun helmet on his dusky head, Lori's darkly gentle eyes looked out at her and made her forget everything else that was distinctive of this palm oil plutocrat of the swamps. She scarcely noticed the sleeping youth whose head rested in the chief's lap, and almost forgot Kingdon for a moment or two.

"*Doh*," Lori said to her. "All be all ri' now. We catch Warri plenty quick."

"Thank you," Annette whispered. "You are so ver' kind and good to help me so much. I am ver' grateful to you."

Lori did not quite understand and his eyes, apologizing for the fact, looked toward Kingdon for an interpretation. Kingdon smiled.

"She say you be good man, Lori, but

I *savez* you besser as that. Good man neber catch forty-paddle canoe. Only chief who *savez* thief palaver too much, catch forty-paddle canoe. Good men, like me, he catch so-so small-boy canoe and get him feet plenty wet too much."

Lori grinned and from somewhere among the cushions behind him produced a bottle of first class Scotch and a shining clean glass, all the while being very careful not to disturb the slumbers of his son and heir.

"All time you say I be thief," he said to Kingdon and poised the bottle over the glass. "But this time, maybe so, you be glad I be thief and catch big canoe. So-so wet feet be no good foh white men." Then he smiled toward Annette. "Make when?"

"When," Kingdon said hurriedly as Lori proceeded to pour whisky into the glass. "You no catch li'l bit sense foh you head? White girl no drink whisk' all same oil canoe paddle boy."

At this Lori laughed till he almost cried. The comparison between the average oil canoe paddle boy and Annette, particularly where the consumption of hard liquor was concerned, apparently struck him as being uproariously funny. He stopped laughing only when the youth, whose head rested on his lap, stirred uneasily and seemed likely to come to life. So he straightway turned the bottle and the glass over to Kingdon and gave all of his attention to his son.

Annette watched Lori's ministrations with something akin to awe, particularly since the recipient of so much consideration had nothing to recommend him to her attention. He was just an ordinary black boy, not one whit different from thousands of others, and his stertorous breathing was none too pleasant to listen to. Yet this chief, who was so great, so wealthy and so powerful in his own land, quieted this ordinary looking black boy's restlessness with a patient kindness such as she—

"Better drink a little of this," Kingdon advised. "It will please Lori and will do you good. Do you mind?"

"No. I—I am accustom to wine."

"This is Scotch. Whisky. Try to drink it as if you liked it."

Annette smiled.

"Perhaps it is that I do like it. How you know? See? I will not make the sour face at all."

Kingdon had to confess to himself that she could, on the surface at least, drink straight Scotch with less effort than he could; and when she smiled her thanks to Lori, the chief looked thoroughly well pleased with himself. Then he turned upon Kingdon a look of sublime contempt.

"Li'l white mammy be besser man as you. All time you drink li'l bit whisk' like so-so piccin no catch teeth. Drink um! Be you sell um!"

SO KINGDON had his drink and made a worse grimace than usual because he knew it would please this child of the swamps to have an excuse to make good humored fun of him. And in the succeeding few minutes, the least of Lori's accusations against Kingdon was that he made so much fuss about drinking a little whisky simply to conceal the fact that he had watered that particular bottle more than usual before he sold it. Thus, understanding each other perfectly, they generously traded insults until Kingdon, carefully noting the route the canoe boys followed, finally said quietly to the chief.

"We no go pass Atba Creek. Savvy?"

Lori Egba did not even flicker an eyelid. Without the slightest hint of a question as to why Atba Creek should be avoided, he looked out under the awning behind him and mumbled a few Jakri gutturals to the canoe headman. The headman answered with a monosyllabic grunt and the matter was settled. Kingdon glanced toward Annette and said in a low voice:

"We won't have to bother about your friends. We are going a different way."

Annette looked relieved, then said as if she mournfully resented being classed with the company in which he had found her:

"They are not my friends, Señor King-

don. You only and this chief are my friends. There is no other. No one. In Las Palmas I am alone. In Madrid I am alone. In London—Liverpool—on the *Kameroon*—" She shivered in spite of the muggy heat of the night and drew her kimono more tightly about her. "But you do not know. You can not know how it is to be alone without friend, without mother, without father—only *him*. Ugh! You can not know how alone is *that!*"

Kingdon was afraid he could not know just how lonely she had been, but he could realize that when she finally broke away from her loneliness, she had done so under the influence of a most feverish and frantic impulse that took no thought of consequences.

Just how he was going to help her so that such help would have any permanent value he had not yet determined, and could not do so until he had a real chance to talk to her and had given her an opportunity to decide the matter for herself when she was quiet enough to come to a decision. At the moment his first objective was his own beach in Warri; and while he had no accommodations for a lady visitor there, his beach was only a stone's throw away from government headquarters and from the bungalow that housed the two nurses in the government's medical department.

Of course, being a fugitive, the girl might not want to go to the nurses' bungalow. The odds were all against her wanting to go there; and if she did not want to do this, or want to put herself under the protection of the district commissioner's wife who was in Warri for the dry season . . .

Kingdon began dimly to realize that there was a grave chance that he had bitten off considerably more than he could chew; and to avoid thinking about it, his mind ran on apace.

Las Palmas—Madrid—London—Liverpool— Spanish-English, probably. But Las Palmas and Madrid had the chronological preference. These places had come first. Then London. Liverpool and the *Kameroon* were comparatively recent experiences.

All West African shipping made Las Palmas a port of call. It was the halfway house between England and the White Man's Grave. There were, however, very few Spaniards anywhere along the West Coast; none at all that Kingdon knew of in the oil country of the Lower Niger. But, to Kingdon, who had a knack of beginning at the beginning before trying to form any sort of conclusion, Las Palmas was a simple and logical explanation for a Spanish-English girl's connection with West Africa.

Madrid, in such a case, would have explained no more than Hyderabad, which would have explained nothing at all. But Las Palmas was a link that could readily bind Madrid to London, and both of them to Liverpool and the trading interests of the Lower Niger.

Properly educated young ladies of Las Palmas "finished" in Madrid and put on the final polish in London or Paris, or both. This girl, who called herself Annette, and who had been so anxious to be introduced to Lori Egba as a good girl, had undoubtedly had the advantages of an education. Just how she had acquired this scholastic and social finish and still been so much alone, Kingdon did not attempt to explain.

But he was reasonably certain that Las Palmas had been the starting point, and her presence on the branch boat definitely said that her interest in the Niger country was a trading interest; a trading interest in which she had probably become involved, obviously against her will, by reason of pressure of some sort exercised by the mysterious and all devilish Marsallow.

JUST what this trading interest might be Kingdon could not even remotely guess. A new competitor probably, or an old one with new money. The fact that an old hand like Scurvey Murvey, whose reputation as a man was negligible, but whose knowledge of the Oil Rivers was second to none, had been enlisted in the enterprise,

indicated that the affair in hand was none too clean and that it meant business in a thoroughly serious way.

"You are thinking ver' serious, Señor Kingdon, of me?" Annette suggested, breaking a rather long pause. "You are thinking I am jus' some trouble for you in this so black and terrible country? I am so sorry."

"No—not at all," Kingdon hastened to assure her. "I was just wondering if the sisters—the nurses, you know—on the government beach at Warri, will have retired by the time we get there. I imagine we'll have to wake them up."

"Nurses! I do not understand. I do not have the fever. I do not need the nurse."

Kingdon smiled, though his hopes were dropping to zero. Lori Egba seemed to be giving all of his attention to his snoring son.

"No—er—no, of course not," Kingdon managed to say. "But you see, they are ladies like yourself and—well, you must have a proper place to sleep, you know."

Annette looked frightened; painfully and pitifully so for a moment or two, and Kingdon got the sharp impression that she was much more afraid of women than of men, and that her experience on the *Kameroon* had had something to do with just this particular fear. Then, with a supreme effort, she took a new grip upon herself and smiled. It was a stony smile and there was not a trace of it in her eyes. The light of life and hope that had been in them for a brief hour of time had gone out with a suddenness that was startling. Yet she smiled and said very simply:

"I understand. Please to pardon my stupidity. Anything you will do for me will be ver' good to me."

So Kingdon knew that the nurses' bungalow and the district commissioner's wife would not be permitted to solve his problem for him. Annette might go there if he said so, but she knew, even if he did not, why there would be no escape from Marsallow in that direction.

"You must not regard that as final," he said hurriedly. "It simply seemed to me, for the sake of appearances and to—er—to be well within the law, that it would be the logical place for you to sleep. But if there are other considerations, other difficulties, we shall have to think of other ways to meet them. Might I ask what you would like to do? What plan, if any, you have in mind?"

Annette shook her head slowly and stared past him at the darkly glinting paddles that lifted and fell with such rhythmic precision.

"I do not know. I have not the plan and I have not the place to go." Then quickly, looking directly at Kingdon, "Please to understand, Señor Kingdon, I am not afraid. Not at all. If I mus' go back it will be the same—jus' the same as before you came on the ship."

"The same?" Kingdon queried mechanically.

"Jus' the same. Marsallow he will laugh and I will hate him jus' a little more and a little more yet. But I not afraid. No. I do not fear the hurt—the whip or the stick or the hand and the wicked word of the tongue. Not at all. But it is after—alone—with nobody . . ."

Kingdon could see her shrink and shudder quite visibly and so could Lori Egba, though he was not supposed to be looking or paying any attention. And both Kingdon and he were instantly reminded of a frightened canoe boy shrinking from the threat of a hippo hide thong. "I think I understand," Kingdon said gently. "And we'll have to think of some other way out. You—that is, you are of age, of course?"

"Yes, señor. I am soon nineteen years."

Kingdon nodded. Over eighteen was safe enough. At that age a girl was a free agent in the pursuit of all normal purposes. If she did not care to remain under the very dubious protection of Marsallow . . .

"This man, Marsallow—he is a relative? A guardian of some sort?"

The girl paused. She looked down at her hands in her lap, then at Lori Egba,

then straight ahead into the black blanket of the bush.

"My mother—brother," she said in a whispery voice that wavered and died, leaving a dull and lifeless expression behind it.

"I see. I am not trying to inquire into your business. Simply to find out where he stands and how much authority he has under the law. You see, in this colony—"

"Marsallow has not a care for the law," Annette interrupted, reviving with surprising suddenness. "What he want he take. What the law do not like, he do. You do not know this Marsallow."

"Apparently he is worth knowing," Kingdon said with a slight smile. "But what I was going to say was that in this colony, no one, man or woman, is allowed to remain here unless he or she has some definite employment or, in the case of a woman, is married to some one who has. In other words we have no white vagrants in Nigeria. One either states one's business and makes some show of attending to it—or gets out. That is the law. But we'll worry about that a little later on. In a moment or two you will see the lights of Warri. They won't be much of anything to look at, but I think we can see to it that you are quite safe there."

ANNETTE looked dubious and continued to look dubious even when the canoe, sweeping majestically around a curve, revealed to her the far, scattered lights of Warri. Lights they were, it was true. They were the sign of civilized habitation and of all that civilization was supposed to mean; but Annette's expression suggested to Kingdon that she felt safer among the cushions on the deck of Lori Egba's canoe.

He was more than inclined to agree with her. In fact, if the thing were at all possible, Egba-town, where Lori Egba was a king— But that would never do. To ask so good and loyal a friend as Lori Egba to assume the risk of running foul of the law's most acute displeasure would not be an act of friendship. Friendship had a double obligation; the obligation to serve and the obligation to protect one's friends from the necessity of assuming one's responsibilities.

There was no sign of the branch boat. It was still, no doubt, crawling its slow way upriver through the network of narrow creeks. Neither was there any sign of Jonah and the launch. Except for the customary quota of trade canoes that hugged the mangrove stick breakwaters of the trading factories they passed, and the presence of the *Ganna-Ganna*, a Liverpool freighter, that was anchored in midstream opposite Barlow's beach, the whole face of the river seemed, if anything, quieter than usual.

"You want catch gig wharf?" Lori asked presently.

Kingdon nodded.

"You come chop li'l bit? I hungry too much all same I no catch dinner."

Lori looked down at his son then glanced apologetically at Kingdon.

"I think so be besser this school palaver son from me go catch him bed proper one time."

Kingdon acknowledged the advisability of this, then added—

"All man tell me he *savez* school palaver all same white man."

Lori did his best not to look too proud, then said with a wry smile:

"He *savez* book and he *savez* count palaver pass all man son from dis Warri. But him belly no good. One li'l bit drink from whisk' and he no *savez* nothing."

Kingdon laughed and told Lori he was an old reprobate to give his son whisky.

Lori nodded solemnly, and Kingdon knew there was a catch in it somewhere.

"You talk true. All time you talk true. Them next time he make thief palaver for my whisk' when he think I no look um, he go catch white man medicine in dat bottle." Lori smiled. "White man medicine be good doctah for thief palaver like dat."

Kingdon was still laughing as the canoe swept in upon Marsden & Company's gig wharf, and Annette, who just vaguely caught the drift of the conversation, was smiling chiefly because Kingdon laughed.

Then Kingdon's laughter died quite suddenly.

The launch was moored in its customary place in the lee of the main wharf just as if it had never been away from there. There was no sign of Jonah or of the Kroo boys who had been with him; but on the house veranda, clearly visible now against the lights of the stand lamps in Kingdon's office-living room, three figures stood erect beside the rail, their faces turned toward the river and Lori Egba's canoe.

Two of these figures Kingdon recognized. One had the round bulk of Harth; the other the athletic silhouette of Randolph. The third figure was unknown to Kingdon. Whoever he was he seemed to tower above both Harth and Randolph so that they appeared almost as featherweights by comparison.

Then Kingdon felt both of Annette's slender hands take a clutching hold upon his arm.

"It is he," she whispered. "Marsallow! There is no other like that!"

CHAPTER VI

KINGDON'S METHODS

NATURALLY, Kingdon paused. The presence of Señor Marsallow on his own veranda was possibly the very last contingency he had expected to have to deal with, and it took neither time nor thought to come to the conclusion that Señor Marsallow was an adversary worthy of more than usual respect.

Evidently the Spaniard, to suit his own purpose, had helped to haul the stranded launch out of the mud, and instead of using it in a futile effort to chase a fugitive canoe through the inextricable network of creeks in the dark, he had calmly returned the launch to its rightful place and was now waiting for the fugitives to come home.

He had, of course, taken a chance upon their going the other way—to Forcados and the *Kameroon*. But Annette's protest against that course led Kingdon to suspect that Marsallow had actually taken no chance at all. He had probably been well aware that Annette would not want to go back to the *Kameroon*. Therefore, since there was no white settlement between Warri and Forcados, and knowing that their canoe was not of the sort that would encourage Kingdon to wander aimlessly about all night, Marsallow was now in possession of Marsden & Company's house veranda, prepared in his own way to welcome his truant niece and her so gallant cavalier.

"You mus' not go up there, Señor Kingdon!" Annette whispered frantically. "He will kill you. He is the devil, and he will be oh, so much enrage! Please. Let me go to him. I will tell him—"

"Just a moment," Kingdon interrupted gently. "Señor Marsallow isn't going to hurt any one. Not yet. He is much too clever to do anything so vulgar as start a brawl on my own veranda. Will you—"

"You do not know him! He is polite as the ice when he is most terrible. Please! Please to believe! I am not afraid for me. No. Not at all. But you and this chief, your friend, and all the so strong black boys—I can not permit! No! I would never sleep—"

"Sh!" Kingdon cautioned quietly as the canoe sidled gently alongside the gig wharf. "You must not let your impression of Marsallow allow you to forget that this is a law abiding colony of the Crown, and that the government, with all its soldiers and policemen and machine guns and so forth, are just over the fence. See that light to the right of that lonely coconut palm?"

Annette saw the light, and the shadowy outline of the headquarters building as well. It was not much more than a stone's throw away from Marsden's gig wharf.

"That light," Kingdon told her, "is in the police commissioner's room. And if he isn't playing poker, he's reading Dante or 'Alice in Wonderland'. Did you ever read 'Alice'? If you haven't you should."

Annette stared.

"You—you, señor—you joke with me when Marsallow is there!" Turning sud-

denly to Lori Egba, who had been quietly watching them both, she pleaded:

"Can you not speak with him? Can you not help me to make him believe?"

"Lori doesn't understand a word you are saying," Kingdon broke in with a short laugh. "And he'd only agree with me if he did." He glanced toward the chief. "All right, Lori. Some 'nother time you come shop with me and we go have some fizzy drink. *Savez?*"

Lori nodded, but he was watching the girl rather than listening to Kingdon.

"Mebbe so be besser I wait li'l bit," he suggested. "Or mebbe so white mammy stay for my canoe and we go gov'ment beach? Gov'ment beach be proper beach for white mammy. No be so?"

Kingdon thought a moment, then jumped lightly from the canoe to the wharf steps.

"Wait. I'll be back."

"No. I can not permit—"

"Stay here, please, and don't move or make a sound until I say so. Understand?"

"But, señor! This Marsallow—"

"I know. He is very dangerous and very clever, but he likes his life as well as the rest of us, and he isn't going to do anything rash tonight. Wait and you'll see that I am right." Then to Lori, "I come back li'l bit or send boy. *Savez?*"

"I *savez.* Be all ri'."

"Thanks. And make white mammy stay for canoe—softly, softly."

Lori nodded unhesitatingly, but cast an appraising eye upon Annette, obviously wondering if she would be easier to keep quiet than a woman of his own kind. Apparently he doubted it. The girl's eyes were staring in fear when Kingdon turned abruptly and walked from the wharf up the gravel path leading to the house.

For a moment or two Lori was quite sure she was going to follow. She was shaking from head to foot and when her hand stole nervously inside her kimono, and the arm suddenly stiffened from shoulder to elbow, he knew that her fingers had closed upon a weapon of some sort. But she obeyed orders. With her eyes upon Kingdon every step of the way to the stairs, where she lost him for a moment as he climbed to the living quarters above, she knelt among Lori's cushions and waited, every nerve and sinew taut as an overstrung violin string.

KINGDON mounted the stairs quietly, without haste or hesitation. He was, in truth, rather eager to meet Señor Marsallow, and the Spaniard's size was among the least interesting of his attributes as far as the little trading agent was concerned. There were many oversized men; men of huge height and girth who were capable enough in their own way. But Marsallow, as Annette had pictured him, was a modern freebooter who had no more respect for the law than a tarantula.

Kingdon knew something about tarantulas, and even when they were inside a bottle, pickled in alcohol, he did not like them. He was afraid he was going to like Señor Marsallow just as little and he had a notion the feeling was going to be mutual. However, he hoped he would be able to get some inkling of the Spanish gentleman's interest in Nigerian trade. That, he was sure, would be interesting, however uninteresting Marsallow was.

He reached the head of the stairs, where he found Harth awaiting him. Harth's round and normally unruffled face had a worried shadow upon it.

"There's a big fellow here to see you—Marsallow is his name—and he says you swiped his niece." Then in a lower voice, "He's an oily swine and he carries a six-shooter. Randolph and I—"

"Better go to bed. How is Balloch?"

"He's all right. Sweating it out. We had a couple of mysterious colored visitors earlier in the evening. Sneak thieves. I'll tell you about them later."

"All right. I'm glad Balloch's on the turn. Try to get some sleep. I won't need you any more tonight."

"But this fellow Marsallow is no ordinary white man. "He's—"

"Yes, I know. But I'd rather you went to bed. Thanks just the same. Good night."

Kingdon walked past Harth and along the veranda toward the great hulk of humanity that awaited him and, catching Randolph's childlike blue eye, which was just as childlike as ever, he said mildly:

"I think Harth wants you. Thanks for keeping house for me."

"Yes, sir. I imagine this gentleman can introduce himself and his purpose quite well without my assistance. Good night, sir."

"Good night, Randolph."

Randolph, whose poise was so perfect and so unhesitating—Kingdon hoped it was not too much so—glanced toward Marsallow, whose face was deliberately turned toward the river and Lori Egba's canoe.

"Good night," señor."

If the big man heard, he very rudely paid no attention. Randolph, however, did not seem to expect him to do so, and with scarcely a pause, turned on his heel and made his way at an unhurried gait toward the assistant's end of the veranda. Kingdon watched him go and noted, just as Harth had done, that though Randolph's shoes were not rubber soled he made no sound at all.

"You wanted to see me?" Kingdon inquired of his visitor quietly and, without waiting for an answer, at once strolled to a Madeira chair in the far corner of the veranda, turning his back upon the giant Spaniard as he did so.

Marsallow made no reply, neither did he move until the creaking wicker, as the little man sat down, told him that his first trick of intimidation had not worked. Obviously he had expected to ignore Kingdon and keep him in suspense for several minutes before deigning to acknowledge the fact that he had arrived. But the creaking of the Madeira chair plainly startled him and his huge bulk spun about with amazing rapidity and suddenness.

Kingdon was reaching for a pipe and a tin of tobacco that stood on a small table at his elbow when he was given that first sudden glimpse of Marsallow's face. He picked up the pipe all right, then slowly put it down again. Marsallow's face was the kind of face that called for one's undivided attention, particularly when it was backed by a cannon-like six-shooter that seemed all too comfortably at home in his ham of a hand.

He was wearing a panama hat, the rim of which flopped down over his eyes and ears; but the curving, thin black eyebrows, the beady black eyes, with the deep, blue-black circles under them, were made even more gloomy and sinister by the shadow the flopping rim of the hat cast over them. The nose, which by all odds should have been thick and bulbous, was lean and aquiline, and gave to the cheeks and mouth a thin and sunken look in spite of his heavy jowl and the bull-like neck that seemed to throw his head forward at a permanently pugnacious angle.

His shirt, which was of white silk, was open at the neck, but like his white drill trousers and white buckskin shoes, was spotlessly clean. Only the panama was sloppy, and though his beard was evidently of the blue and wiry sort, he was cleanly shaved. Below the neck he was just bulk; huge, powerful and devastating bulk; a kind of human avalanche that, because of the forward thrusting angle of his head, always seemed ready to come thundering down and crush the lesser atoms beneath.

KINGDON noted most of this as he put down the pipe upon the table; the eyes, nose and mouth particularly. They were the mind and the character and the whole manner of the man. His tremendous size, his ponderous six-shooter and his ham-like hands seemed to be adjuncts he did not really need, but which he trailed around with him to serve his purpose upon those occasions when such things proved useful. But they were not nearly so devastating as his sharp little black eyes, his lean hooked nose and his thin slit of a mouth that now curbed down at the corners in a sour and sardonic smile.

And yet, even then, almost in that first

instant, Kingdon knew there was something wrong with the picture or with the impression it gave; something lacking. At first glance he would have been inclined to say that the girl who had called herself Annette, had been one hundred per cent. right about this man Marsallow. And then just a little something missed fire somehow; something vague, indeterminate and elusive as yet, but at once, Marsallow, the prince of darkness, became a man. Terrible, of course; half a dozen men in one perhaps, but a man for all that; human; with his quota of human weaknesses, whatever they might be. Off hand, Kingdon was quite sure he had a bad liver.

Marsallow stood looking down at Kingdon for well over a minute before he spoke; then in a smooth soft voice that almost purred he asked—

"The Señor Kingdon is not afraid?"

"Afraid? Of course I am. I don't like being shot at or having knives thrown at me. Better put that thing away and let's have something to drink."

Señor Marsallow paused. The pause was in his eyes and in the hand that held the gun, and his smile hesitated, too. Then he bowed.

"You are the brave man, Señor Kingdon. Not many who are afraid have the so great courage to say it at the right time. The stupid courage of the fool—it has made many guns to go off. But this gun it will not go off again. Not yet."

With a polite gesture of compliance with his host's wishes, he returned the gun to its holster. Kingdon inclined his head gravely, reached for his pipe and waved his guest toward a chair.

"What would you like to drink? I have some excellent port that I'd like you to sample for me and tell me what you think of it. May I—"

"Nothing, señor, I thank you," Marsallow said smoothly and did not sit down. "It is my sorrow that I have not the time at the moment. But upon some other occasion, if you will permit, my niece and I will have the great pleasure to call upon you and enjoy a glass of your so excellent wine. You are, I am ver' sure, a good judge of the fine wine, señor; but for the present you must excuse. I have the appointment with my niece."

"I'm sorry," Kingdon said and gave no sign at all of appreciating the suave subtlety of the Spaniard's little speech of refusal. "I'd like to get your expert opinion of that port, but if you must hurry away, I suppose you must."

Marsallow smiled the blandest of smiles while the hollow of his great right hand caressed the butt of the pistol.

"You appreciate, señor, it is ver' late for the girl so young to be out from her—I think you call it her sleep of beauty?"

"Yes, of course. I hadn't thought of that."

"And as you have shown her the so great courtesy, señor, to bring her to me before she is compromise, I am ver' sure you are realize that you mus' speak not at all of the indiscreet of a girl who is too inexperience to know how ver' serious it is if you were not the true gentleman, señor. I have the great honor to salute you, Señor Kingdon, and to bid you the ver' good night."

Marsallow bowed, with his hand still on his gun, and the bow was so sweeping Kingdon wondered why he did not remove his hat and make a finished job of it. Then, Marsallow had spun about with a thunderous kind of speed and was several long strides away before Kingdon said:

"Just a moment, señor. Do you mind telling me where you picked up Scurvy Murvey—the skipper of that branch boat of yours?"

The Spaniard halted sharply, hesitated, then turned slowly; just enough to look at Kingdon sideways out of one gleaming little black eye.

"You are acquaint with Captain Murvey, señor?" he asked in a low voice that was just a little thick.

"Oh, yes. I've known him for years. And I just wondered why a gentleman of your standing should take the risk of intrusting your interests—or any part of them—in the hands of such a man. I assume, of course, that your interests are

trading interests and that you would like to create a good impression for your enterprise."

MARSALLOW did not answer at once. But he did turn his full face toward Kingdon and stood regarding him as if he were wondering if it were really possible that his reasons for doing anything had been questioned and by one who was, from his point of view at least, so much his inferior. Finally, with his thumbs in his belt, his head even a little farther forward than usual, he said:

"I appreciate, señor, that you are ver' kind. But it is my pleasure to have engage Captain Murvey, and if he is not the good recommendation, that will be the difficulty I am realize, but I am accustom to those. Sometime I come over the difficulty—sometime I am remove it; and sometime, señor—"

"Don't threaten, Marsallow, and don't lose your temper. Your words are falling over each other. *Savez?*"

Marsallow stiffened and straightened, just as if he had been grabbed by the collar from behind. In Kingdon's hand he saw a harmless briar pipe—this and nothing more—but in Kingdon's eyes there was a quiet that he, Marsallow, had never known or seen before. There was nothing aggressive about that quiet; nothing that threatened or antagonized. It just was. And it wasn't a thing that could be intimidated with threats.

Obviously, Señor Marsallow saw this; and Señor Marsallow, as Kingdon suspected, never really lost his temper at any time. He did not have to. He needed no spur of that sort to make him destructive; but he doubtless found it advisable sometimes to give the impression that he was about to lose his temper and that things would begin to happen if he did.

Kingdon had saved him the trouble of a demonstration on this occasion, and for a few moments Marsallow was decidedly at a loss. His customarily successful tricks of intimidation were not working properly, principally because they were not allowed to get under way. And this man Kingdon's eyes—so very quiet, so very sure . . .

"Don't fumble with that gun of yours so much," Kingdon advised quietly. "You're only bluffing, and we both know it. You wouldn't shoot me here and now, even if you wanted to; and if you did you'd be so full of lead in the next minute you wouldn't have time to get any fun out of it. Understand?"

Marsallow whirled in a complete circle with a rapidity that was really astounding in so large a man, his ever ready gun drawn and whirling with him like a streak of dull light. There was no mistaking his enormous capacity for taking care of himself and he doubtless had long ago realized that his size made him a rather easy target for an unseen marksman. But there was no fear in him; not a trace of it; and obviously he was no stranger to an ambush.

Kingdon watched him whirl and smiled slightly and hoped Marsallow would not imagine he saw some one who was not there. Then he said quietly:

"It's all right. You're quite safe. No one will do any shooting until you begin, and I am quite sure you are much too busy to think of getting into trouble tonight. Sit down and tell me about yourself. I might be able to help you. I've been in this business a long time."

Marsallow put his gun away again and stood erect. Then, very impressively, he folded his great arms. He stood like this, eyeing Kingdon through narrowed lids, for many long seconds, as if he were trying once and for all to make up his mind about him. He spoke at last, slowly and deliberately:

"You are, as I have say, Señor Kingdon, the brave man, even if you are protect with gun I do not see. You have insult me in my house affair, and you have insult me in my business affair, and you have insult me with the offer of your so excellent wine—and though you have insult me like this, you do not show the fear or even the excite. No. Not at all. But perhaps it is that you do not know

Marsallow—me—how I am when I am insult."

Kingdon shook his head.

"You'll only go to jail and get kicked out of the country if you start trouble around here. And that would interfere with your business, wouldn't it?"

The indeterminate something about Marsallow that made him human in Kingdon's eyes became suddenly more pronounced; a kind of hungry, frightened glint in his little black eyes.

"And I take it," Kingdon added quietly, "that your business is of the sort that must not be interfered with. In fact, your business—the money involved—is worth much more to you at this moment than any satisfaction you would get out of killing me. My life isn't worth a peso to you. Your business may be worth many hundreds of thousands of pounds. Much money can be made in this trade, señor, if you know how to go about it."

The glint in Marsallow's eyes sharpened; and sharpened so decidedly that Kingdon had not the slightest doubt now on the subject of what it was that made this man mountain quite human.

Greed. This and mighty little else. Specifically, money greed. Even the blue black shadows under his eyes seemed to become less marked as his whole face livened up with the light of his one great passion. This light, of course, was subdued and flickering at the moment, but Kingdon had little trouble detecting or interpreting it.

Money, he was sure, was the only god this man had ever known. He would do anything at all for money, and his shadow of a soul had been bought and paid for many times in the course of his tempestuous life.

"Much money," Kingdon repeated lingeringly, and deliberately continued, "The color of palm oil, señor, is the color of gold. It has been bought at the price of many lives, but you would lose all that you might gain as the price of mine." Kingdon smiled. "Am I worth it, señor? My little life against all the money you might make? I think not."

Above all things else, Marsallow was not a fool, and he had wit enough to know when a game, for the time being at least, was played out. Also, there would be other days and other occasions when Señor Kingdon would not be seated on his own veranda. So he unfolded his arm and made another sweeping bow.

"The Señor Kingdon has the great wisdom. I am delight with the trick of the tongue. It has been my ver' great pleasure to have listen." Then, most apologetically, "But the wine, señor. I am regret it is too late in the night. My niece she have wait the ver' long time in that canoe—"

"What canoe?"

"The big canoe, señor, at the little wharf."

Kingdon shook his head.

"She isn't there. A mail launch going up to Sapeli had a nurse on board, and she went along with her."

CHAPTER VII

THE WAGER

"SAPELI!"

Kingdon nodded.

"I understood she was getting away from the disagreeable attentions of Scurvey Murvey, and I'd help any girl in a case of that kind. That's one of the results, Marsallow, of hiring the wrong skipper. You get yourself and your business judged accordingly. Better sit down and have that drink. I think you need it."

Marsallow looked and felt as if he needed something. He pawed at the butt of his gun in a hopeless kind of way, his sharp little black eyes glinting in every direction in a futile, hunted fashion that gave Kingdon the decided hint that Annette was a very necessary adjunct to the business the man had in hand.

Whispered Spanish and English exclamations mingled for a minute or so and every so often he would repeat the name Sapeli as if he were trying to realize just what such a destination or contingency

meant to him. Then he looked down toward Lori Egba's canoe long and steadily as if he were trying to see through the grass awning that screened the occupants of its little deck from view. It was too dark to see any one or anything at that distance in any case, and the canoe carried no lights that mattered. Presently, still rubbing the butt of his gun with the palm of his hand, Marsallow faced Kingdon again.

"The launch from Sapeli with the nurse, señor—what is her name?"

"The *Vigilant.*"

"And the nurse? What is her name?"

"I didn't ask, and she did not volunteer the information. But you'll like her. Why?"

"Because, señor, you are the very great liar. There was not the *Vigilant* and there was not the nurse. My niece she is in that canoe. I have seen her."

Kingdon did not even blink and made no move to rise.

"Then you have better eyesight than I have. But I'll bet you fifty pounds she isn't. Fifty golden sovereigns, señor. Is your eyesight good enough to urge you to take that bet."

Marsallow's jaw dropped; and straightway he judged Kingdon—as Kingdon knew he would—by his own standards. He might gamble with his life for a peso, but to risk fifty English sovereigns on a bluff . . .

"We will go down and—"

"Do you take the bet?"

"She is my niece and I have the right —"

"You have the right to take your complaint to the police commissioner. Do you want to do that?" Kingdon rose. "I'll go with you, if you like."

"My niece, she is in—"

"Otherwise I'll thank you to take yourself and your guns and your knives and your business off my beach. *Savez?*"

"I am insult, señor!"

Kingdon looked up at the man who dwarfed him almost to the point of the ridiculous.

"So am I, Marsallow," he said, and his voice was as quiet and sure as his eyes. "Your every act since I arrived has been an insult and a threat, and you conclude the performance by calling me a liar. It seems to me, Señor Marsallow, that your association with Scurvey Murvey is a kindred association. You are two of a kind."

"Señor!"

"And the nature of your business will be investigated accordingly. Do you understand?"

Marsallow understood perfectly. Apparently he was an understanding man when he knew his bluff of the moment was played out. His eyes moved shiftily back and forth between Kingdon and the canoe, and the seething impulse that possessed him to lose fifty English sovereigns on the bluff, and thus save his face, was a turbulent and a terrible thing to see.

There was pride in him, as his spotless clothes and clean shaven chin testified; and dignity, with him, was a business; one of the lesser gods. But there were moments—and this was one of them—when pride and dignity were called upon to pay a price for their existence. And Marsallow . . .

The suddenly polite oiliness of his manner in retreat was not pretty to watch. The great bulk of him seemed all at once to shrivel and shrink in a fawning bow.

"I am regret, señor, that I have spoke too quick with the tongue," he said, and obviously tried to speak his very best English. "The Captain Murvey, I am also regret, was not the gentleman. But though he have not the better quality of educate, such is not the excuse with me. I am educate and I am the gentleman, señor. For me it is the shame—the ver' great shame, señor, and if the señor will please to pardon, I am make mos' happy."

Kingdon bowed gravely.

"Very good, señor. I am glad we understand each other so well." He paused a moment as Marsallow's glance shifted to the canoe at the gig wharf. "You came up here in my launch, didn't you?"

"Yes, señor."

"How are you going to get back to that branch boat of yours?"

"I am—" Marsallow halted. He had been on the verge of telling the truth, and the unusualness of such a course plainly startled him. It was a decisive indication that, for once in his life, he was very badly rattled. However, he covered the mistake credibly enough. "Perhaps the canoe, señor—"

"What canoe?"

"Some ver' small canoe, perhaps, señor, that is cheap to hire?"

"I'll lend you my launch again, if you like."

"No, señor, I thank you—" with his eyes hungrily upon Lori Egba's canoe, and his hungrier, greedier little soul writhing in an agony of doubt. Fifty sovereigns! "I have already impose ver' much upon you, señor. But the small canoe—"

"All right. You can hire one down at the breakwater. There are always one or two hanging around, and if there aren't I'll lend you mine. Let's go down and look them over."

Marsallow followed a step, then stopped, his beady little black eyes filled with fear as they lingered more hungrily than ever upon Lori Egba's canoe. Fifty English sovereigns! Fifty. And if she was not there . . .

"What's the trouble?" Kingdon asked, knowing the answer quite well and wondering how such a thing could possibly be.

"Nothing, señor; no, not at all." Muttered Spanish exclamations followed this and Marsallow swung suddenly away from temptation. "The canoe, señor, the canoe," he said thickly. "I am delay too long already."

KINGDON led the way and Marsallow followed, looking over his shoulder most of the time. His expression was that of a man who knew he was being tricked, and when the little man who walked before him so quietly and calmly, led the way down the stairs and across the dark of the beach below to the breakwater, Marsallow looked down from his great height and wondered at it all.

Marsallow, of course, did not understand that in Kingdon's case as in his own the answer was nothing more than a state of mind; as far as Kingdon was concerned, the state of mind that held firmly to the belief that Marsallow would do nothing in haste that his business would repent at leisure. Marsallow was quite well aware of the fact that he never did anything hastily or in temper or upon an impulse of any sort, and he knew this principally because he was still alive in spite of many things that would have put a period upon the lives of the majority.

But he could not understand how Kingdon knew it; or rather he did not give Kingdon credit for knowing anything about it, which, of course, made the little trading agent's courage the most spectacular thing of its sort in his experience. It was uncanny to the point of being supernatural, and as they walked along the creek side, with the squat, black shadow of the kernel store between them and the house and Lori Egba's canoe, Marsallow became acutely aware of a desire to get away from there as quickly as possible.

Later, when he came back again, it would be different. Very. But at the moment, with the palm of his hand still nervously rubbing the butt of his gun, Marsallow was afraid. He did not know why he was afraid, or exactly what he was afraid of, but he did know that, there in the cover of the darkness he loved so well, it was he and not Kingdon who knew the meaning of fear.

Presently Kingdon halted beside a canoe that he thought would serve Marsallow's purpose, and Marsallow, to Kingdon's surprise, agreed that it would and did not ask the sleepy owners the price. He would pay as little as possible at the journey's end in any case—that is, if he elected to pay anything at all. The haste with which he stepped into the canoe also came to Kingdon as something of a shock.

"Good night, Marsallow. Hope you don't get your feet wet."

"Good night, Señor Kingdon. I am regret about the wine. But you will do me the great honor to permit me at another time. *Adios.*"

Kingdon stood watching the bulky shadow of him drift down the little creek and out into the Warri River, where the canoe's nose pointed downstream. Then Kingdon walked around the front end of the kernel store to the main wharf and stood there awhile to be quite sure Marsallow's did not decide to return for a free look under the awning of Lori Egba's canoe.

Presently Kingdon strolled over to the gig wharf.

"Señor Kingdon!"

"Yes. It's all right now. I've just seen him off."

The girl was out of the canoe and at his side in an instant, gripping his arms and looking eagerly into his face in a frenzy of excited unbelief.

"He is gone? Marsallow! You have send him away and you are not dead? *Madre Dios!* It is miracle!"

A string of Spanish was interjected here but she came back to English again and drew Lori Egba into his proper place in the limelight with a gracious gesture.

"Your friend—he has keep my head for me when I am lost without him. You will please to thank him for me, señor. I have not his words—the English that is pidgin—"

"That's all right," Kingdon assured her. "I'm sure Lori knows what you mean in any case." He waved a parting salute to the chief. "Good night, Lori. Keep your eye out for small so-so canoe with big white man in it. *Savez?*"

"I *savez.* Palaver set?"

"Palaver set foh dis time."

"Eh-heh! Be good. I go now. I look you one day pass. Chin-chin."

Lori grunted an order to his headman, moved his son's head a little on his knee, doffed his sun helmet to Annette and smiled.

"You be all ri' now, Mas' Kingdon fix. He catch plenty too much head for fix-um palaver."

The canoe drew away from the wharf and curved majestically out into the river, forty paddles lifting and falling as one. Annette watched a moment, then touched Kingdon's sleeve with her fingertips and whispered:

"I have not the fear now. No. Not at all." The touch of her fingertips became hesitatingly firmer. "It is not yet to believe that Marsallow is gone, but I have not the fear."

"That's fine," Kingdon said, though he did not believe her. Her fear of Marsallow—and he could thoroughly appreciate it now—was too deep rooted a thing to be overcome so quickly. "And now we had better go around to the back door. Marsallow may be watching the veranda from the river."

"Yes, señor."

SO THEY went around the house to the galley entrance, picked their way over the outstretched legs of a sleeping house boy or two lying sprawled on the galley floor, climbed the back stairs and, of necessity, passed the only billiard room in Warri in which, at the moment, Harth and Randolph were apparently playing billiards on the slowest and lumpiest table in the world.

Kingdon stopped in the doorway, with Annette's very white face and still blacker eyes looking over his shoulder.

Whether she saw Harth at all was doubtful in those first few seconds, because her eyes fell immediately upon Randolph's face and stayed there—wide and staring. Randolph was leaning on the table, under the full glare of the lamps, and the view Annette had of him, in spite of the moths and flies that tried to cloud the lights, was certainly clear enough. The little choking gasp she gave made Kingdon turn his head sharply:

"What is it? Something startled you?"

Annette's expression floundered, but she managed to pull herself together.

"No, señor. It is nothing. The too bright light in my eye—"

Kingdon accepted the reason for her startled expression with reservations that were principally concerned with Randolph's vividly contrasting blond beauty. At that time and place, in the spotlight of the billiard room lamps, he did not doubt but that Randolph was startling enough to make any girl gasp.

"I thought I told you fellows to go to bed?"

"Yes, sir," Randolph agreed as a junior assistant should and left the explanation to Harth who fell heir to it by right of seniority. Randolph—though he did not see Annette as advantageously as she saw him—was too busy trying to be sure that what he did see was true, to have much interest in explanations in any case.

"Well, we weren't tired," Harth said, "and we thought a little billiards on this table would make us sleepy and—"

"Then I wasn't altogether bluffing when I told Marsallow what would happen if he started shooting?"

Harth looked at Randolph and Randolph looked at Harth, and Harth said finally:

"Randolph said you had heard me getting into your office through your bedroom. I'm not as expert at crawling around on my stomach as he is."

Even Annette laughed at this, though her eyes did not stray from Randolph's face for more than a second or two.

"I didn't hear you, as a matter of fact," Kingdon said. "But I had a notion you were somewhere around. And now, let me introduce you to Señor Marsallow's niece, Annette." He stepped aside and bowed gravely to the girl. "My assistants, Annette. Mr. Harth. Mr. Randolph. Both at your service."

Annette accepted the introductions by bowing to Randolph and ignoring Harth altogether. Obviously, too, she did not mean to be discourteous, but there was evidently something in Randolph's face that gripped her whole attention, even to the exclusion of Kingdon.

"Let's go into my office," the little man said, "and talk things over. We have to decide what is best to be done about finding Miss Marsallow proper accommodations and—"

"I am not the Miss Marsallow!"

The protest had a wealth of fire and indignation in it, and it was so sudden and unexpected even Kingdon stared. Randolph, who had retrieved a lighted cigaret as soon as introductions were over, choked and coughed and brought Annette's attention back to him at once.

"I do jus' like that," she said, "when I smoke the cigaret and am excite." She looked at him more closely with the same incredulous light in her eyes. "You are very young for this country? Jus' a little time you have come here?"

"About six months," Kingdon said, since Randolph momentarily was hardly able to answer for himself; and Annette turned to Kingdon and smiled.

"His cheek, it has yet the English pink, and his eye is clear like the baby."

Harth laughed, but she paid no attention to him. She was looking at Randolph again, softly but very steadily, with an increasing wonder that she could not conceal.

"Somewhere I have seen you, have I not? Somewhere, some one like you—so fair, so blue of the eye, so ver' handsome—a long time ago. No?"

Randolph calmly dabbed his lips with his handkerchief.

"Not I, I'm afraid," he said and glanced toward Kingdon rather abruptly. "I imagine Captain Duncan of the *Ganna-Ganna*, that's lying off Barlow's beach, would help you out by accommodating Miss—er—Miss Annette with a cabin. I understand Duncan is a very good friend of yours. Didn't that roast beef we had for dinner come out of the *Ganna-Ganna's* refrigerator?"

"Excellent, Randolph!" Kingdon exclaimed, and Harth's troubled face lighted up like a full moon. "Why on earth did I not think of that? The *Ganna-Ganna* used to be in the mail service, and still has very good passenger accommodation." He turned to Harth. "When does Duncan clear out of here?"

"Not for a couple of days at least," Harth said. "He is going alongside Perkins & Gray's wharf tomorrow and the African Merchants' across the way have a shipment of oil for him, too. He'll be here at least tomorrow and next day."

Kingdon nodded thoughtfully.

"That's slightly different," he said. "But our problem of the moment is solved—that is, if Miss Annette is agreeable." He turned to the girl. "Would that be all right? Captain Duncan of the *Ganna-Ganna* is a friend of mine, and his chief steward is one of the kindliest of men. They would take very good care of you."

Annette hesitated.

"The captain of the ship—he is your friend? Like the black chief? He do not ask the question also?"

"Of course not."

Annette seemed to find it difficult to credit this.

"So many friend," she whispered. "But—but—please to pardon the—the passage, señor. I have not the money here. I have not the—"

"That's the least of our troubles," Kingdon assured her with a great deal of conviction. "Also the detail of more clothes. We can fix that, too." He glanced toward his assistants. "Let's go into my office and I'll send a note to Duncan."

HE LED the way and they passed into his office by way of his bedroom, avoiding the veranda and any possibility of being spied upon by the gigantic Marsallow. Annette accepted a seat beside the desk and Harth and Randolph made themselves comfortable on the couch. Kingdon called a boy and, having ordered drinks according to his guests' desires, proceeded to write a chit to Captain Duncan.

Conversation lagged. Harth did not seem to know what to say to a young lady who was traveling under such palpable difficulties, and the young lady herself was too intent in her study of Randolph's face to encourage conversation of any sort. Randolph did his best to seem indifferent to this continued scrutiny and welcomed the intrusion of the drinks just as if he had ordered something stronger than ginger ale.

Kingdon gave the chit he had scribbled to the waiting house boy with instructions that were to be transmitted to the beach headman, word for word. This done, he asked Harth in particular:

"What's the trouble? Have you never talked to a lady before?"

"It is the Señor Randolph who is so quiet," Annette interposed hurriedly over the rim of a glass of port Harth had poured for her. "He has not the word for me? Is he always the so silent man? Or perhaps it is he do not like me?"

"Not at all," Randolph said at once, and seemed to revive miraculously. "Perhaps it is that the effect of meeting you in this rather unexpected place has been just a bit too stunning. You are quite as unexpected as the place, you know, and some small allowance must be made for me if I take some time to catch my breath."

Annette laughed, glanced quickly at Kingdon, who was apparently intent upon filling his pipe, then at Harth who was eyeing what was left of his whisky and soda as if he had not heard a word. So the girl's attention returned to Randolph speculatively.

"You say the pretty speech, señor, when Señor Kingdon crack the whip? Jus' like the automatic man in the wax-work when the button is push. Perhaps it is the automatic man that I have seen who is so like you?"

"I don't doubt it," Randolph agreed, paying no attention to Harth's grin. "I've seen lots of wax-work figures that look exactly like me—tailor's dummies particularly." He smiled. "So perhaps if you were very young when you saw the figure you mention, you are probably distorting the memory a bit and making it come to life. I am glad I remind you of something that was worth remembering."

Annette smiled and said:

"You are not the tailor's dummy, and it was not the tailor's dummy that used to come to me so ver' long ago in Las Palmas. No. This man was ver' beautiful to me. He was ver' high in height and his hair and his eye—jus' like your hair and your eye. That is why I speak of it, señor. He was ver' beautiful to me—a child, a ver' little child, señor. And you are him again."

She paused, shook her head slowly and incredulously and continued:

"So much you are like him to me, it is not to believe. It is like the fairy story that is alive."

Then before any one could say anything that would have been in the least adequate, she added apologetically:

"Please to pardon, señor. I have not the wish to embarrass you. No. Not at all. But the memory, señor—it is like the very strong light, the light like the lightning, señor, in a ver' dark place where no light have been before."

Randolph nodded, smiled a rather strained smile, looked down at his boots, then up again quite bravely. Walloping Harth's jaw was not nearly as hard as this.

"I—er—I understand perfectly. As I've said, I am glad I have reminded you of something really pleasant. But—er—your eyes have a penetrating quality and the inside of my head is beginning to feel as if it had been taken apart and put together again with some of the parts missing."

ANNETTE laughed, and Harth and Kingdon exchanged significant glances that wondered not a little. Then, when the girl had emptied her glass with a sudden flourish, she said:

"There are no parts of your inside head missing, Señor Randolph. Not one so little part. To be so ver' young, you are so quick with the tongue. So ver' quick, señor." She turned and smiled to Kingdon as she put down her glass, and asked a little nervously, "When do I go to the ship, señor?"

"Immediately. We'll meet the boy who took my note to Captain Duncan on the Barlow beach gig wharf. I wouldn't dare leave from ours. Marsallow may not be visible, but he's somewhere around and watching."

"Yes, señor. That I know. Marsallow is always where he is not expect."

Kingdon did not doubt it, and with a word of caution to Harth and Randolph about keeping their eyes peeled in case Marsallow did plan something unexpected, he straightway proceeded to remove his sacred charge from the premises.

She lingered a few moments over her good night to Randolph—moments in which she seemed to be trying to take a mental photograph of him away with her—and she had very little to say to Kingdon when they had emerged from the galley and were heading toward the gate that led to the government beach. She did not even ask how far it was to Barlow's gig wharf; did not ask a single question. And this was significant in itself. Strangers, under much less exciting circumstances always asked questions, and there always seemed to be so many questions for them to ask.

Annette, however, was not at all curious. Not then. She stopped when Kingdon stopped to speak to a watchboy; she went on again, when Kingdon went on, without a word of comment. Apparently she had no interest in Kingdon's words of caution to the watchboy in the matter of a surprise attack by Marsallow. It was almost as if she had forgotten Marsallow completely; as if Randolph's sudden entrance into her life had made her mind drift far afield from the present scene of operations.

Kingdon was distinctly aware of her abstracted state of mind as he hurried her through the gate leading to the government beach and piloted her past curious native policemen who stepped aside at his low voiced assurance that everything was all right. And as he was doing quite a lot of thinking on his own account, he did not encourage conversation.

Every so often he turned his head and

peered into the palm clothed shadows behind them to be sure they were not followed; and presently, with the assurance that Marsallow was nowhere in evidence, he swung the Barlow beach gate on its squeaking hinges and slipped the girl through ahead of him.

A Barlow beach watchboy with a hurricane lantern scuffed into sight on a lazy run.

"Canoe live foh breakwater, sah," he said; and Kingdon knew his instructions to his headman had not gone astray. "Gig wharf catch launch, sah."

"All right," Kingdon agreed. "We go foh breakwater."

So they crossed a broad stretch of parched lawn under the generous screening shadows of mango and palm, toward a particularly lonely section of the Barlow beach mangrove stick breakwater where Kingdon expected to find his messenger to Captain Duncan—plus a very necessary canoe—awaiting him.

Suddenly Kingdon paused and turned his head. The faintest kind of squeak had sounded behind him—a sound that at once suggested to him that some one had passed through the Barlow beach gate.

"What is it, señor?" Annette whispered.

Kingdon could see nothing that gave him any information and presently said quietly as he moved on again:

"It's all right. I'm just doing Marsallow the honor of being very careful."

"That is wise, señor," Annette approved. "Marsallow is always the unexpect."

Kingdon did not doubt it in the least, and he had a queer premonition that something unusual was about to take place.

The watchboy, when they were within a few yards of the waterfront, stopped suddenly and began muttering to himself in Kroo.

"What's matter?" Kingdon asked.

"I—I no *savez*."

"Where canoe? Where my Kroo boys?"

"I—I no *savez*. Dey done go 'way."

Evidently they had, for there was not a trace of the canoe or the Kroo boys along that section of the breakwater. Annette plucked nervously at Kingdon's shirt sleeve.

"It is Marsallow," she whispered. "He is somewhere—not far. I know him. He is—"

She had turned her face toward a giant mango tree; a mango tree with a large trunk that, even as she looked around, seemed to move toward her. Sharply she swung her lithe young body between Kingdon and the sound of the low, suave laughter that came slowly and terribly toward them both.

"Run, señor! Run!"

CHAPTER VIII

GOLIATH

KINGDON did not run. He heard the laughter of Marsallow and he could plainly feel Annette's trembling excitement and fear of his account. But in the first moment of surprise he was more interested in the Barlow beach watchboy, who seemed to be content to stand aside, lantern in hand, and await orders. Anybody's orders. Marsallow's, perhaps, for preference.

"The nurse without name have been very good to send my niece back to me so soon," Marsallow said softly and, in that heavily shadowed darkness, the great bulk of him seemed to climb into the branches overhead. "But I am greatly disappoint in the cleverness of the Señor Kingdon. To send the messenger with the note to the ship in the river—that is always the mistake."

Kingdon had gently sidled into a position where Annette was now behind him and he had a full view of Marsallow, his inevitable gun and his even more dangerous polite and oily smile. The Spaniard had undoubtedly been extraordinarily astute and watchful, amazingly quick to act and perhaps a little lucky. Or else treachery had been afoot. In any event the Barlow beach watchboy was no longer

the Barlow beach watchboy because he was now sheltering himself behind Marsallow's gun arm and was taking a detached interest in the proceedings, as is the habit of Kroo boys who have obeyed orders and are waiting for further instructions.

"The odds would seem to be all on your side, señor," Kingdon conceded. "And I congratulate you on your superior sagacity." He bowed gravely. "I assume, of course, that you will now take me before the police commissioner and charge me with abduction."

Marsallow's smile became somewhat thinner.

"That, señor, can await till the commissioner have awake in the morning. *Now*, my niece, she will—"

"No! You have not the right; I am not the niece! I am not the—"

A storm of Spanish invectives, like the thunderous warning of an oncoming avalanche, heralded the plunging charge Marsallow made, and the speed and the force of it swept Kingdon off his feet in a twinkling and flung him into the shadow of a wine palm just as if he had been thrown aside like an empty nutshell.

Annette tried to leap aside, but the kimono and the uncertain footing hampered her and Marsallow's huge left hand closed upon her shoulder like a grappling hook. Instantly excruciating pains that paralyzed all action stabbed down to her heels. She was no stranger to that agony or to the muttering profanity that accompanied it, and the sudden nausea that gripped her was not new to her either.

Cold beads of perspiration broke upon her forehead and her knees seemed ready to buckle and break, but she knew she must not faint. Not this time. For, this time, there was Señor Kingdon to protect from harm. She was not alone now. Never again, after this night, would she think she was alone; not after one white gentleman and one black one had been her friends without a single question.

So, this time, at their service as well as her own, she must not shrink from the promise of a little blood upon her hands.

Her eyes were closed, but she knew where Marsallow's heart was. Her hand, inside the kimono, was pressed against the very spot as the Spaniard held her close to him and filled her ears with oaths and threats that had been familiar to her even before her days of first primers.

Gently, very gently, the hand inside the kimono began to move and, to give the hand more freedom of action, she swayed and lurched a little, clenching her teeth upon pain and nausea and the awful numbing paralysis that seemed to be creeping over her, inch by inch, from her shoulders down.

She moaned a little and Marsallow smiled. She knew he was smiling though she could not see his face because his grip on her shoulder tightened just a trifle, and the fingers of the hand inside the kimono seemed to be losing their power of action.

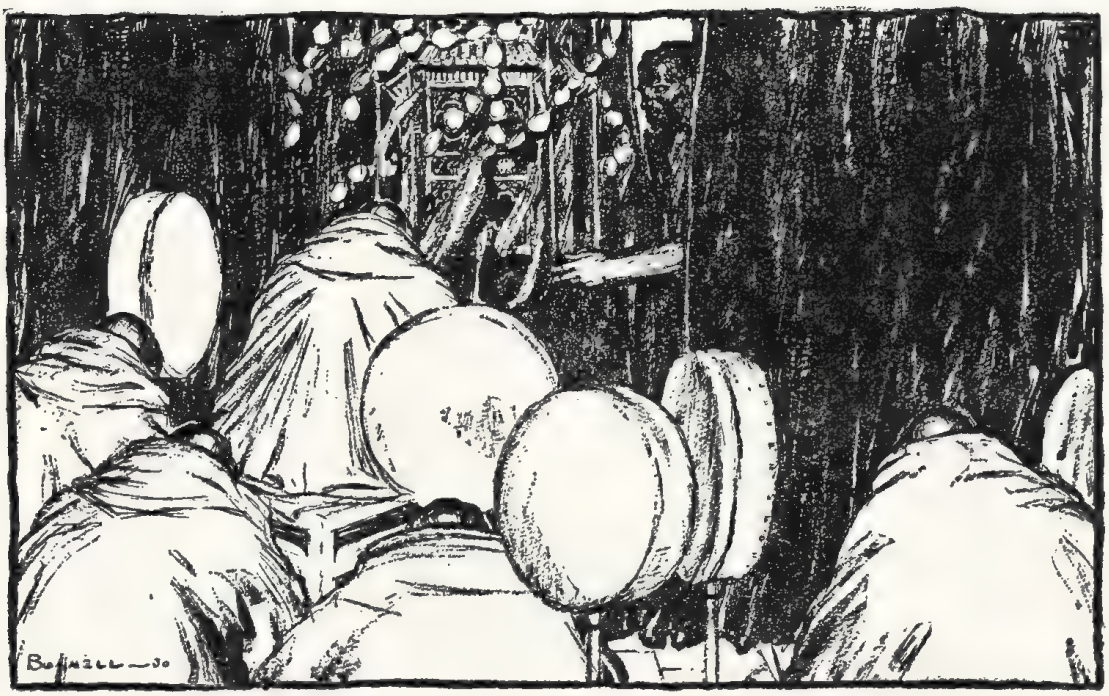
And then a choked off Kroo guttural of amazement came to Annette's ears from a great distance and she did not see the flash of blond lightning that struck Marsallow between the shoulders, hung itself around his neck and, apparently, stayed there. She saw none of this because the impact released Marsallow's grip upon her and flung her to her knees several feet away.

Wholly taken by surprise by the soundless speed of the attack from behind, Marsallow tottered, staggered a few steps, then, with a desperate effort straightened, choking for breath. There was an arm across his throat.

TO BE CONCLUDED

Shrouded in mystery, the holy of holies of the Yellow Lamas, forbidden and perilous to white men . . .

The WHEEL *of* LIFE



By SIDNEY HERSCHEL SMALL

McCLURE awoke before it was really light, and found the Bhutanese city of Mehelis dead asleep. A little breeze ruffled the dusty trees outside, blew wrinkles in the ditches, and went racing northward toward the near Tibetan border, leaving the sky clean and bare. McClure lighted a cigaret, dressed, looked at his watch and walked from the house. He paced about the city walls until the red sun bellied out of the Tsang-ko-ri hills and struck fire on the gilded lattice of a temple.

Somewhere a prayer wheel whirred and clacked, and then from the crimson and turquoise ornamented doorway of the temple came the sound of a lama singing —a sharp strong voice, tremulous in the open notes. Shaggy, savage mongrels chained in the courtyard began to howl; priests, hurrying to be present at morning prayer hour, kicked the animals silent and immediately set up a baying of their own, more discordant than that of the dogs.

The sun kindled McClure's bronzed face as he stopped to listen.

The fervor of the yellow robed lamas,

who should have shouted a perfunctory "*om mani padme hum*" before gobbling at bowls of barley flour and mutton fat, made the white man thoughtful. His eyes were narrowed as he began to stride toward a flat roofed house, before which, motionless now about its staff, a flag hung in folds. A sentry in the uniform of a regiment of Burma Rifles stepped aside to let him enter; a Bhutanese servant, waiting for him, padded ahead showing the way.

McClure found the political commissioner sitting in the garden behind the house. With him, sitting on carved teakwood chairs, were several Bhutanese and Tibetan nobles, in colored silks and brocades; and an *amban*—an official of the Chinese government—in black and gold. The remains of breakfast cooled on stands, as if the men had talked more than eaten.

Through the garden a stream rippled from terrace to terrace; the water, at the foot of each fall, turned a prayer wheel, and for a moment there was no other sound. McClure had been prepared for Kingsley to assume an aloof official manner, but when he held out his hand the commissioner made no effort to grasp it. Instead, coldly, he merely said—

"Sit down, McClure."

Just once, swiftly, McClure glanced about. The Bhutanese, he saw, were observant and a trifle wondering; the Tibetan's faces were masks, but the Chinese *amban* appeared to be waiting to see how McClure would respond to the curt invitation.

"I'll stand, thanks," McClure said, and was rewarded by seeing the *amban* nod as if pleased with the equally unfriendly answer.

Kingsley shrugged.

"As you will," he said, and deliberately finished his cup of tea without asking if McClure had breakfasted. Then, "I find this difficult, McClure," he said, not looking up. "We've been friends, you know. But your tapping of rocks, your digging, must cease. Sorry. It was stretching a point to permit an American to come here at all, even if your company's British. You've chipped bits from sacred stones, and dug in sacred soil."

"Have I?" McClure asked. "Is that why you sent for me?"

"Exactly," the commissioner said. He unbuttoned his coat and drew out a folded paper, of some length and oblong. "If my investigation showed that the complaints made were justified, I was instructed by Calcutta to present you with an order to leave." He handed the document to McClure. "This is the order. You will please arrange to start at once. Your goods will follow by porters. You are, my orders state, to use one of my carts, and the government also has decided to furnish you with a small escort."

"Not interested in hearing my side of the story?"

Kingsley shrugged a second time.

"Not at all," he said and, turning to one of the Bhutanese, began to speak with him in dialect.

McClure found himself unpleasantly dismissed, without a decent word of farewell; this left him bleak, cold, and with anger rising. The *amban*, hands concealed in his wide silken sleeves, was happier than ever. Why? And why old Bob Kingsley's nasty manner?

Although the commissioner—a man no older than McClure, and with face as wise and tanned as the American's—was explaining to the Bhutanese something about a play to be given by a troupe of Sikkimese actors that noon, McClure broke in clearly with—

"Goodby, Kingsley."

The Englishman paused, coughed, looked up; his expression seemed to tell all present, "What? Are you still here?" For the flicker of an eyelid his eyes held McClure's. Then, quite tonelessly, he said:

"Oh, yes. Goodby, McClure. And—ah—good luck, you know."

Only that meeting of eyes prevented McClure from ripping the document Kingsley had given him into shreds, and

sailing them down the stream. As it was, the American thrust the sheets into his pocket, turned abruptly and walked swiftly out into the busy, noisy street. He heard the *amban* say something in which "courtesy" and "evil temper" were both involved.

His Bhutanese boy, part Chinese, part Tibetan, part Kachin, had tea, marmalade and hard biscuit ready for him, and McClure asked shrewdly:

"*Nga garu yosa la leb mi t'ubbo?* You know I am going away, and hope for a present?" He yanked the servant close. "How did you know?"

The Bhutanese attempted to avoid the eyes so near his own, but broke in the end.

"*De na namk'a na ta zhyan zhyi t'on'ar gyur to,*" he whimpered. "There was a sign from heaven, O master. A white fish was seen flying southward in the form of a cloud."

"And who showed you this white fish?"

"Every one in the city knows of it," was the best McClure could get from him.

ALONE, McClure looked about the room which had acted as headquarters for a long year. In the corner, on a camp chair, was a tin box, filled with geological reports, some complete, many needing additional data and verification—which he would never be able to make, all on account of British stupidity. To some one else would be given the honor of discovering the valuable Tsang-ko-ri oil country.

McClure unlocked the box to place in it the document given him by Kingsley; he almost thought aloud: "I can guess what it says. 'In view of certain circumstances his Majesty's Nineteenth Secretary to his Excellency the Viceroy' . . . A lot of damn rot, but I might as well see just how rotten it really is."

As he broke open the seal, he found that the document was really a letter in Kingsley's scrawl, and that another sealed note was enclosed. McClure opened the enclosure first.

It was a brief order from his company, telling him to cooperate with the government should a request be made of him. McClure's superior wrote that he realized the company's interests were being endangered, and for that reason wanted McClure to go as far as possible in assisting the British authorities. The note gave him instructions to go wherever asked, and to consider a government order as having the sanction of the company. McClure was told to use his own judgment, but to comply unless he felt the request was absolutely unreasonable.

McClure didn't see the point. Unreasonable? That was exactly it! The only thing he'd been asked was to get out!

As he turned to Kingsley's letter and began to read, his face lit swiftly, and then turned grim.

Dear Yank:

The Amban Tser Chang-li doesn't seem to want you here. He has made representations which indicate that your odor does not please his nostrils, and he must have smelled a lot of bad stinks. We have agreed to ship you out of here, and I am going to have a try at doing it to Pooh-Bah's satisfaction, right before him. I'll be what you call British as hell.

Why does the *amban* wish you kicked out? We wish we knew, and we want you to find out. I think it is because you know the country, and the language, and would report anything strange which transpired to us. Tser Chang-li has a reputation which would make a vulture's craw be as jasmine flowers. He is mixed up with revolutions by instinct.

Our guess is that Chang-li's son, supposed to be in Tibet studying under a very sacred lama, is being groomed as the coming Dalai Lama, the ruler of Tibet. If he is selected, Jim, the borders will run red, and every treaty we have with Tibet and Bhutan will be torn up. Yank, we don't desire this lad as Dalai Lama, and the time is near for the selection. Prowl about like a good fellow, and kidnap him for us. My only bet is that he is hidden at the Gyantzor lamasery—the one white men don't get in—because it's inaccessible and the lamas there are a brigand crew anyhow.

You know how the Dalai Lama is chosen. He must have the heavenly manifestations: Marks as of a tiger skin on the legs; eyes and eyebrows curving upward; big protruding ears like an elephant's; two pieces of flesh near the shoulder blades indicating where a devil touched him; the imprint of a conch shell on the palm of one hand. All that would be easy for a man of Chang-li's artistic abilities.

Here's how you do it, if you'll try—and I wish I could go with you . . . "

McClure's ears, always alert, made him stop reading. Loudly enough for any one near to hear, he growled—

"This is a miserable trick to play on me, just when I'm getting somewhere!" He balled the sheets together as a man might in anger, making a gesture as if to throw them away, but finally thrusting them carelessly into his pocket.

He was reaching for a cigaret just as the bland Tser Chang-li padded noiselessly through the door. Behind the *amban* McClure saw his servant, thoroughly frightened; what he must have heard was the browbeating command of Chang-li to be permitted to enter unannounced and silently.

The *amban* said immediately, in trade jargon—

"I bow my head that I have so hurried into your benign presence, O master of the secret of rocks, but I feared lest you depart before I could offer my sympathy for the unhappy scene which I was forced to witness."

McClure, unsmiling, bowed gravely.

"It is unfortunate for a man to see his learning and labor wasted," the *amban* went on. "I was told by the servant of the *raj*, Kingsley *sahib*, that you have torn from the rocks of the hills all that their unspeaking surfaces keep concealed. That is a very wonderful thing."

"What I have done is nothing," McClure said. "Much remains to be discovered."

"The Tsang-ko-ri hills are vast. In which portion did you find success?"

McClure saw no reason to continue the flowery exchange of words.

"Are you offering payment for the information?" he demanded.

Chang-li spread out his hands; his face was that of a man affronted. Without Kingsley's letter, which McClure had not finished reading, the Chinese might have fooled the engineer. As it was, the white man was prepared, alert and already finding zest in the task Kingsley had requested.

"I but came in courtesy," Chang-li protested earnestly. "Surely it is not wrong to speak of another man's sorrow that his labors have been in vain? Payment? I am a poor man—" he rubbed his hands together; they gave forth a dry sound—"but I have heard it said that there are men who would pay much for the knowledge stored in your head, or even for just a scrap of paper telling what you have learned; and I thought also that, even as I, you are a poor man— *Ho*, what a noise those accursed street musicians make! It will break the skin of my ears! Can you hear what I am saying?"

McClure had, until the mendicant players seemed to have stopped just outside his house. The din was terrific. Flutes wailed, trumpets shrieked and blared, cymbals clashed with reverberations like summer thunder, and hoarse voices screamed to the underbeat of drums.

The demoniac noise gave McClure opportunity to think. Chang-li, as Kingsley had guessed, was certainly mixed up in the business. For once McClure's short temper kept itself curbed, although the exterior racket, and the *amban's* veiled offer, jerked at it. The thing to discover was just how keen the *amban* was to get rid of him, without letting the wily Oriental know too much.

"Get out of here," McClure shouted in English, simulating anger perfectly. "Get! Don't look blank. I've got a notion you're responsible for my bein' kicked out."

Chang-li shrilled exactly what McClure hoped—

"Did Kingsley tell you?"

"All Kingsley, the pup, told me was what you heard. The two of you're together in gettin' rid of me, so you can both get rich on oil. All right. I can't square matters with the Britisher, but you put him up to it—you've admitted it—and I can square things with you!"

Chang-li smiled discreetly.

"That will be difficult, my friend," he stated, and allowed himself the satisfaction of spitting delicately on the floor. "I am under the protection of—"

McClure's temper snapped in earnest.

WHILE the *amban* was reaching higher up his sleeve, as if he felt the necessity of feeling the assuring haft of the knife undoubtedly concealed there, McClure leaped from his seat, caught him by both elbows and held him as in a vise.

"I know a bribe when I hear one," the white man bellowed above the din outside. "You think we'll never meet again, but I won't forget that you tried to knife me in the back by lyin' to the authorities."

Eye met eye; neither dropped his glance.

"The next time," Chang-li snarled, "it will not be in the back, white slug. Keep far away from me! It is lucky for you that Kingsley orders you out of Tibet."

McClure, angry as he was, nevertheless knew that Chang-li, better than he himself, was simulating rage, and that cooled his own. The *amban*, sly as he was in interpreting expressions, believed that he had thoroughly frightened the white man—and then made his mistake, intending to make a perfect job of it:

"Keep away from me," he repeated, "or you will suffer more on earth than you will in hell. You will be tormented, and I will see it. I will drag you through the mud of grief. You will be defiled, soiled—and all through me."

McClure grinned.

"Good," he said. "First, however, I'm going to see you soiled yourself, Chang-li."

Never changing his grip, he picked the Chinese from the floor and, with the bleating of flute and tremendous blasts of trumpet as accompaniment, carried the *amban* through the house swiftly, unheeding of the spitting lips and, kicking open the hides hung across the outer door, hurled him into the crowded street.

The falling *amban* did not strike yak and horse dung immediately; he went to the mire by way of a gayly clad drummer.

McClure did not stop to listen to the yellow man's cursing, in which the white man, his forebears, and any descendants he dared have, were all heavily involved. Back in his room, he was smoothing out Kingsley's letter when noise in the house made him shove it out of sight a second time.

An apparition stalked into the room—the drum player of the troupe; his grimy hand was outstretched, palm upward, but McClure was so taken with the man's masquerade that for a moment he did not see it. The drummer was almost as tall as the white man; his face was painted black as coal. The eyebrows were chalked white; two round white spots were plastered on each cheek, one on the forehead, one on the middle of the chin. White whiskers, made from yak hair, hung from ear to ear. A head covering of red painted cloth met the false beard and, in the back, came clear down over the fellow's shoulders, ending in a chain of circular ornaments of silver and turquoise. The drummer's costume, belted about by a cardinal sash, was in every hue from yellow to purple; his feet were encased in yak hide boots. Behind him, holding the attached stick in one hand, he rolled a skin drum.

Grinning, McClure decided that the music for the act which had just concluded ought rightly be paid for, and he dropped a silver coin into the strolling player's hand.

The man with the hideously painted face looked at the coin, and then his lips parted in a broad smile.

"Rotten taste you have for music, old fellow," he said in excellent English. "A copper'd been nearer the mark, what?"

McClure gasped, but managed to say—

"Where'd you come from?"

"Calcutta," the masquerader returned. "Give me a puff of a cigaret, will you? Thanks. I've been drummer boy for a week, but it was worth it, to see old Chang-li hit the dirt. Haven't you read Kingsley's note?"

McClure pulled it out, and then hesitated before looking at it, half sorry that he had done that much.

The drummer said quietly:

"I'm safe, even if I'm only a pawn in the game. Go ahead and read your letter.

Kingsley thought you'd have known the the contents before we started tootlin' outside."

McClure stared into the steady eyes, and knew that the other was not lying; he began to read rapidly:

> Here's how you do it, if you'll try—and I wish I could go with you. A troupe of Sikkimese actors, the sort the Tibetans are wild about, came to Mehelis last night, over a different trail. One isn't Sikkimese at all—none of them are, for that matter—but one of us. His name is Robertson. He is about your size. He is so religious that he is painted black. He's going to be you. Change with him. When he goes inside your house, I'll send a cart which takes you out of Bhutan. He'll go in it, not you.
>
> The Sikkimese aren't Sikkimese at all. They are Gurkhas from H. M. Burmese Rifles, all have seen service abroad, and they are a tough, hand picked lot who haven't forgotten that the Tibetans killed their fathers during raids, and carried off their sisters.
>
> It is strictly up to you. It is not the price of your staying in Tibet. We would keep you here somehow. The enclosed is from your own company, and has been held pending just such an emergency. They have been informed, and probably know themselves, that there is trouble in the air.
>
> But have a try at nabbing this incarnate lama-to-be of Chang-li's offspring. If you can't the border will run red some of these days, probably when we are busy putting down rebellion in the southern cities. And, whether you try or not, my best, old boy.

"Messy, what?" Robertson said, drawing the final puff from the cigaret. "All ready?"

He did not add what McClure might be ready for; it was unnecessary. The two men stripped in silence, and then Robertson calmly unfastened the clips of the skin covering the drum, and drew out bottles, brushes, dyes. First he washed himself clean with a piece of cotton dipped in fluid from one bottle, then, swiftly, rubbed cream over his burning face and neck.

"Burns like sin," he said. "Not as pleasant, however. Don't glance at the door, old fellow. My Gurkhas are watchin' out. Your own boy's prob'ly listenin' to stories about devils, if he understands border talk. I wish I knew Tibetan. If I did, Kingsley'd have sent me for the fun. There—I feel white again. Stand here where, I get some light on you, and I'll daub you up, eh?"

ROBERTSON went about his work rapidly, explaining matters to McClure in a casual voice. The troupe, at noon, were to perform in the temple for the delectation of Mehelis. Kingsley felt that if McClure's disguise were penetrated, it would be done where the people knew him, and that if it did happen, Kingsley's own convoy, plus the Gurkhas, should be able to prevent serious trouble. After that, it was exactly as the commissioner had written—up to McClure.

"How do I talk with the Gurkhas?" McClure asked.

"Swear at 'em in English, offer 'em food in French, and then try the sign language," Robertson suggested. "You'll get along; I did." He stepped back. "Did I look as bad as that?" he chuckled, surveying McClure. "You needn't be afraid of beatin' the drum; I had it specially made, and even with the bottles inside, it'll make a lovely lot of racket. The dye's labeled. Keep your hands dirty; you might rub 'em in the gutter as soon as you can. And sweat a lot, old boy. You don't stink enough for a native. Now give me a hat, what? I hear Sawn Ko—he's an old peach—yellin' about gettin' out of the way of a cart, and that's the signal. We'd better give the onlookers another performance, eh? I'll seem to run you out of the house, and when the old eyes are attracted by your beauty and whatnot, I'll get into the cart, and you go with the Gurkhas. Ready? And—Article Three of the 1907 Treaty remarks that we engage not to send representatives into Tibet, so if you're caught, begin to pray."

The two white men's hands met and gripped.

"Ready?" Robertson asked again.

McClure's eyes lighted with excitement.

"Let's go," he said.

In another minute the heavy wheeled,

curtained cart was clattering down the street, and McClure—supposed to be exiled—was banging away with fervor on his drum, as, in the middle of the troupe, he marched toward the temple.

The Gurkhas howled away joyously, since the first part of the venture had gone like clockwork; the onlookers would have enjoyed the spectacle less if they had been able to understand the words:

"Bu jung bu n'na'n shang ke na wa!
Myi'ha hpai n'na k'pa ye na wa!"

It sounded to the amused Bhutanese and Tibetans and lamas like the foolish doggerel to be expected from the soft fools from the southern plains. Actually it was a song the Gurkhas had learned from their fathers:

"Tighten your belt, little son!
Grow up and shoulder your gun!"

None of the Gurkhas carried rifles, but concealed somewhere in every man's outlandish costume was a short barreled automatic and heavy bladed knife. The knife was curved, for good work at close quarters; the bullets for the automatics were hard nosed issue shells, but the Gurkhas, having good memories and much to remember, had carefully cut a little V on the end of each, down to the softer lead beneath.

McClure, in changing, had belted Robertson's own gun about his middle, although the Englishman's bullets had not been turned into dum-dums.

No stranger assembly could have been gathered anywhere in Asia than the audience in the temple courtyard at noon. Bhutanese nobles, surrounded by guards in crimson and yellow silk, trailing modern rifles butt down, strode haughtily ahead of Tibetans, both men and women in high collared gowns of sheepskin reaching to the knee and hanging very full at the waist; higher caste Tibetans, in garnet colored cloth trimmed along the bottom with leopard or tiger skin, argued with Chinese venders about the price of smoking hot dumplings and other delicacies. Lamas in red or yellow, shawls thrown over their shaven pates to shield them from the sun; Mongols from Kokonor and Ts'aidam; wild K'amba from Tibet with their long, matted hair cut in a fringe over the eyes and carrying matchlocks with antelope horn supports. And, sitting on a piece of carpet, was Kingsley—smoking steadily, conversing with lords and nobles as if he had not a care in the world. Sitting just behind the carpet was Chang-li. In the crowd behind him were several Chinese, and McClure thought their soldierly bearing was not in accord with their dress—that of staid merchants.

Kingsley, McClure felt, was not wrong when he feared something was up. What troubled McClure most of all, now that he remembered it, was the early morning fervor of the yellow lamas. He wondered what had stirred the indolent priests and what the result would be.

Mehelis thrummed with sound; bells, tremendously long horns, trumpets, skin and skull drums, were being sold at cloth covered stands and put into immediate and awful use by the natives. The troupe would be hard put to better the racket, although the Gurkhas did not seem worried about their ability to do so. Bloody, fly covered butchers' stalls were filled with hungry, noisy patrons. On the hard earth was spread the wares of pedlers: trinkets, prayer beads, mirrors from Japan, wooden bowls, barley flour, salt, sulphur, images of gods and devils from Lhasa, drugs, chunks of tea looking like plugs of tobacco, books of obscene pictures from Europe which helped the honor of the white man little, Tibetan knives, cloth . . .

Suddenly the crowd thronging the courtyard and the streets leading to it scattered. Down the way leading to the main gate of the temple strode a half-dozen lamas with black stripes painted across their foreheads and around their bared right arms. They swung heavy *ho-shang* whips with which they belabored any one who was within reach.

No orders had been given the troupe, who had spent the rest of the morning in giving McClure practise on the drum

by performing up and down the outer walls, save that they were to be at the temple by noon. The motley band waited just outside the gate. When the whip swinging lamas passed them the tip of one of the thongs flicked across a Gurkha's face, leaving a triangular red weal.

The Gurkha blinked once, and then laughed as if it were the best joke in the world. He was still laughing when a stately lama, following the others, stalked up and gave a signal for a place to be cleared for the performance directly in front of the honored guests' carpet.

INSIDE the temple the constant clacking of prayer wheels beating out the monotonous *om mani padme hum* ceased as a horn was blown, and the lamas—hundreds of them—rushed out to witness the excitement.

Sawn Ko growled a command to his fellow Gurkhas, adding to it that fruit grows best on the tree of patience, and then the troupe of devil dancers, Sawn Ko leading, the other ten behind him, with McClure bent over his drum last of all, stepped along the narrow lane between the spectators.

McClure had been well schooled. He beat his drum loudly, making up in clamor what he lost in rhythm. Since he was obviously a religious man, by reason of his black painted face with its white spots, Tibetans and Bhutanese touched his robe, or, the better to acquire a little of his virtue, ran their tongues along the leather of his boots. McClure never stopped beating the drum, although he wanted sorely to kick out.

Nor did he ever look up, save cautiously; had his eye been blue, the task would have been impossible. Pah Tse T'iang, who had accompanied him as head porter up into the hills, walked past him, very close, but glanced at him with no more interest than at any of the other players.

The trumpets blared and the flute wailed; two of the Gurkhas did a devil dance while the others howled a chorus of gibberish. The pantomime was clear enough so that all the natives applauded the horrible end of the devil, the lamas noisiest of all. McClure's keen ears, when the drum was mute for a moment, caught this from one of the Tibetan onlookers:

"And the white devils will be driven out just as easily! When—"

Some one must have placed a hand over the speaker's mouth; at any rate McClure heard no more. If Kingsley knew anything of this undertone in the horde, he certainly gave no sign of it as he sipped tea and exchanged comments with the Bhutanese and Tibetans. McClure wondered what the commissioner—his friend—would do if some one were to tear the disguise from the black faced drum player.

He was anxious for the endless performance to be concluded. Anxious to get started—where? Kingsley's guess had been that the lamasery at Gyantzor concealed the candidate to rule Tibet—Chang-li's son. It would take days to reach the place, but McClure believed Kingsley had good reason to suppose it harbored the youngster who was to serve as Chang-li's tool. Certainly more than the laconic Kingsley had told in the note.

On went the performance; McClure kept beating away at the drum while he figured possible plans of campaign. Near him—too close for his nostrils—several Tibetans cut off chunks of maggoty mutton with their long heavy knives and regaled themselves while enjoying the performance. McClure wished he were back in the clean, cold hills. Oh, well, he soon would be, on what might prove a fool's errand, but which offered excitement as well as helping out old Kingsley . . .

What startled him was a higher screech than even the leather lunged and willing Gurkhas had been able to achieve—a screech so blood curdling that the gorging Tibetans choked over lumps of meat in their anxiety to begin muttering *om mani padme hum* against the presence of a devil from hell.

McClure looked swiftly toward the sound. Behind the carpet, behind Chang-li, the Chinese merchants and the horde of villagers and the Mongols and Bhutanese, standing on the broad steps of the temple, a lama swayed. Time after time he shrieked, and McClure, knowing the words, turned uneasily toward where Kingsley continued sipping tea as if nothing were happening.

As he turned, the lama, frothing at the mouth, spume flying from his gray lips, tore down the steps, a long crooked blade over his head. The throng parted to let him pass; McClure, taking his first half-step forward while reaching under his costume for his gun, was pressed back by one of the Gurkhas, who repeated a word he must have often heard overseas:

"Steady! Steady, O *sahib!*"

Of the entire audience, only Kingsley seemed unaware of what was so rapidly taking place. Chang-li, like the others near him, had stepped aside. Had the Chinese thrust out his foot the infuriated lama would have fallen to the packed earth of the courtyard. One of the Bhutanese lords sitting near the commissioner jerked futilely at Kingsley's sleeve, and then fell from his chair in his eagerness to get out of range of the lama.

Sawn Ko—McClure, hemmed in by Gurkhas, was too tense to know what really happened—seemed to have come erect after having stooped, although none saw his compact body bend. Between the troupe and Kingsley, and the lama who leaped toward him, was an empty lane. Just as McClure, able to stand it no longer, tore his hand from a Gurkha's grasp and went desperately for his gun, Sawn Ko's body seemed to jerk back, and at the same time his right arm shot forward.

Bluish light flashed down the lane. The lama's long blade was in the air above Kingsley's head, and then, as if by magic, flew twenty feet up, while the yellow clad priest clutched once at his throat and then, screaming once terribly, fell across the carpet, turning it redder than any dye could ever have done.

In his ear McClure heard:

"You see, *sahib?* Sawn Ko was ready. Now beat away at your drum, for we will have visitors! Beat slowly, like a death march."

Hands pulled the knife Sawn Ko had hurled from the stricken lama's throat; eyes examined it, and then began to turn toward the troupe of Gurkhas, until wiser heads in the angry throng pointed out that the blade never came from the southland, but was a Tibetan eating knife.

The performance was over; a grave lama dismissed the gathering. The Gurkhas were forgotten as the strange ending of the holiday was discussed at large. Who had killed the sacred lama, who had been visited by a devil and commanded to kill the Englishman? Every voice argued differently. One Tibetan, who had been eating mutton near the actors, could not find his knife, and supposed it was lost when all rushed forward toward the dying lama. Wisely, lest he himself be accused, he said nothing of his loss.

"*Sahib,*" the grave Sawn Ko said to McClure, as they walked in close formation toward the walls, "I feared some one might have seen me pick up the knife. Every eye was elsewhere."

"It was well done, Sawn Ko."

"Better than if a shot had been fired, or one of our own blades hurled," the Gurkha agreed. "Later we may need every bullet." He began to hum to himself the song about belts being tightened and guns shouldered.

By midafternoon Chang-li, who might have stopped the murderous lama so easily, was engaged in two enterprises. On one hand he was endeavoring—so he told Kingsley—to discover who had incited the priest to attempt the life of his honored friend, the commissioner, while on the other he was trying to find out who had sent the Tibetan eating knife so accurately into the lama's throat. His efforts took him into every kennel of Mehelis, but the only answer he received from the villagers was "*Su-kyang k'ong-la lag'pa*"—no one knew anything.

By evening it was decided that the gods and devils had stricken the lama, and even Chang-li let it go at that. What the astute Kingsley thought he never said. As the moon came out of the hills, round as the sun had been, but very white, across the silence of the city came the droning of the priests:

"*Om mani padme hum! Om mani padme hum!*"

Kingsley, uneasy in his hot bed, heard it, and wondered where his Yank friend might be and what luck he would have; Chang-li, on his knees in the temple with many priests, heard it, and repeated the words. The head lama, feeling dissension among his fellows, moaned in his sleep; the natives snored after an exciting day; and Sawn Ko, bringing up the rear of the troupe as they marched up the hill path away from Mehelis, turned and spat against a rock.

GRAY skies were familiar tents to McClure. It was dusk of the sixth day before they had crossed the last sharp cold mountain, the last enormous empty plain, and stood in sight of the lamasery of Gyantzor. It had not been easy. McClure had known how to reach Gyantzor, or the surrounding hills, but on other expeditions he had been properly equipped; this time he had shivered and suffered with the Ghurkas. A half dozen thin robes, one over the other, did not protect his skin as his hide jacket and thick wool socks had done.

McClure thought that now Gyantzor was in sight the worst of the business was over, but the only way to approach the lamasery seemed to be from the south, and again they started up a side ravine, climbing the side of a mountain whose peak was covered with deep snow. Yak were pastured on the far side of the valley. The ground, as the party advanced, was covered with broken rocks, shale and slate. Innumerable streams flowing through the melted snow converted the soil into deep mud through which they plowed knee deep. Up the side they floundered, working always toward the bleak lamasery which seemed thrust into the hill itself.

The valley was far below; McClure and Sawn Ko did not believe it necessary to have gone to it first, and then try to find the trail to Gyantzor; but as the night darkened, they wished they had not made the effort to reach the place until morning.

Soon progress became impossible and, fireless and supperless, the men waited for the dawn, huddled behind rocks to keep off the wind. Not once did any of the Gurkhas protest or whine; when, after the morning start, they came to a few dry branches under a gnarled, twisted tree and made a fire, where clothes were dried and tea made, they laughed at the miserable night.

They saw two things ahead: duty and revenge.

McClure, on his part, was growing keener for the entry into Gyantzor—if they were able to get in. The Gurkhas could have forced their way through the gates, but that would accomplish nothing; they must play out their ridiculous part until McClure was able to discover what was up, and whether or not Chang-li's pawn—his son—were in the lamasery.

Up to the tile topped gateway the party toiled. Above them the high white walls of the lamasery loomed. In every narrow aperture—none lower to the ground than sixty feet—were heads. Shaven pates of lamas; yak hair wigged nuns. And, as McClure and the Gurkhas saw plainly enough, men whose heads were wound about with blue turbans, and who had already thrust rifles from the windows.

A shot shattered a rock before the advancing troupe.

"We are not wanted here," a flat faced Gurkha said happily, in his own dialect. "I am tired to death of being dressed like a woman. Let us see if we can act like men of our tribe."

"Be still," Sawn Ko chided gently. "There will be fun before it is over. Our *sahib* does not look like a patient man."

The shot had stopped them, and at a word from McClure they set up their

awful music with what breath they had left. The smallest and fiercest of the Gurkhas began to whirl and contort in a dance.

McClure, near enough the gate to decipher the inscriptions on it, said to Sawn Ko—

"Tell your men that I have read the writing on the gate, and that it says the brave Tibetans crossed the south mountains, fought seven battles, won seven victories, captured much loot and many women, and that the Gurkhas ran away."*

Sawn Ko repeated the words, and then sighed gently.

"I find it hard to play on my flute," he said, and nothing else.

Out from the gate, at last, came several lamas and, with them, men dressed in blue and white north-China uniforms, with bandoleers about their chests and modern rifles as arms. One glance told how unfriendly the cortège was.

McClure's heart skipped a beat, and then he stepped forward, bowing very low, pulling at his ear and thrusting out his tongue in humble greeting.

"*Ka-ye!*" the leader of the lamas acknowledged.

McClure bowed again, lower than before.

The lama immediately began to question him in swift Tibetan. Who was he? Why was his face painted black? Was he a religious man? Who had told him to come to the lamasery? How did he arrive? Did he not know he could be killed for coming, or at least have his nose slit? Who were the strange men with him?

To all this McClure wisely looked blank, which his painted face made easy. Instead of replying to what he understood well enough, the white man thrust a hand into the leather pouch hanging from his bedraggled crimson belt, and drew out two silver coins.

"Chung-kar," he said, naming a distant city on the Indo-Tibetan route. He drew out coppers. "Tsa-la Peh," a nearer village.

Rapidly he announced the names of various towns, showing coins for each, and then, pointing to the lamasery and to his pouch, gave a couple of half-steps as if starting to dance.

His pantomime was obvious.

"*Sum dang zhyi-cha,*" the lama said nervously. "The receiving of visitors is not forbidden."

Sawn Ko, at this moment, blew several fearful notes on his flute, and that seemed to decide the Chinese officer at the lama's side. He nodded his head briefly, and the lama explained very slowly what would be expected of the troupe when they were permitted within the sacred walls. Again McClure merely stared at him and, although permission had been granted, did not move ahead until the officer himself pointed toward the gate, holding up a coin that was to be the reward for a good performance.

WELL surrounded by Chinese soldiers, McClure and the Gurkhas came to the outer gate. The approach was guarded by three round towers connected by double walls of thick gray stone. Around each of the towers, near the top, a broad ledge fortified with a low wall projected, behind which men crouched in command of the entrance.

There were still a dozen steps to be mounted, and then the way led through a narrow passage beneath a loopholed wall. McClure kept his eyes discreetly down, as did the Gurkhas, but all managed to map the route in mind. They passed under a second gateway and into a courtyard where lamas swarmed, some telling beads, fewer turning prayer wheels, and fewer still bent over ponderous books. The third gate brought them to the true interior of the lamasery—more like a fort than a residence for priests—and here the lamas took them to a bare room high in the building.

Two of the Chinese and one burly lama remained outside the open door. While the Gurkhas slipped out of their packs and selected fresher costumes for

*From a stone tablet telling of the defeat of the Gurkhas "as recorded in the Female-Bird Year": Sir Charles Bell, K. C. I. E., C. M. G.

the performance, McClure walked soberly toward the one window. Far below he could see the lush valley, green, with spots of red where rhododendron bloomed. To the south was the hillside slope over which they had come; north and west the empty mountains went up in jagged pinnacles to the sky.

Before he left the window Tibetan boys brought eggs and rice colored with saffron, and a leather bottle of brackish *murwah*, tasting like flat beer.

Mouth full, Sawn Ko said to McClure—

"At least they feed us in this prison."

So the Gurkha knew how difficult escape would be if the lamas and Chinese decided to hold them! Kingsley had felt that if McClure found Chang-li's son, the Gurkhas would be able to fight their way out of any Tibetan lamasery and carry off the boy. But now . . .

As calmly as he could, McClure said softly—

"We will find what we came for."

"Otherwise there would be no Chinese here," agreed the Gurkha. "But—how? And when we find him—what then?"

They ate in silence after that.

Noise drifted up; clacking wheels, the tinkle of a bell, many droning voices; a conch was blown, and the lamasery became more turbulent than ever. The troupe, supposing that the lamas were gathering to witness the dancing, made haste to prepare themselves. A little trumpet player daubed his brown skin with blue paint. McClure whitened the spots on his own blackened face. Sawn Ko, as the conch howled again, sauntered toward the window.

The burly lama at the doorway called to him loudly, so obviously an order to stop that Sawn Ko turned slowly, and then continued walking about as if he had never intended to go to the window. As he passed McClure he said quietly—

"Men are greeted with the conch."

The Gurkha enlightened McClure no further, but as he strolled by his men he said a word here, another there. Then, calmly as before, he started again toward the window. He was his body length from it when the lama shouted at him again, angrily, this time his voice stifled in the din below. Sawn Ko, instead of pausing, stepped to the window. The lama growled a word to the soldiers, both of whom ran into the room, the lama after them.

McClure's lips tightened. He was alarmed by Sawn Ko's inciting of the guards; then, eyes wide, saw what the Gurkha had planned, although he never had the chance to hinder it.

The soldiers, one after the other, trotted across the room, but—all in the same fraction of time—the lama no longer followed them. A Gurkha had drawn his *kukri* from nowhere, and had slid it into the lama's side; another of the brown men had his hands about the lama's throat so the fellow could not even gurgle; a third eased his body to the floor and held it there so it could not writhe. The two Chinese strode toward the oblivious Sawn Ko, unaware of the swift murder in their rear.

The foremost of the soldiers, hand extended to grasp Sawn Ko, died without knowing that the lama and his companion, had both died noiselessly before him. It was all so swift, so unreal—thrust knife, strangling hands, pinioned bodies—that McClure was only able to stare in horror. Three men dead. Even their death cries were stifled by the Gurkhas.

"Now," Sawn Ko said evenly, "prop them against the door, brothers, and you, Alaw Bhom and Gam K'aw'ti, remain near them to care for any visitors. If any come, treat them gently, brothers, and add their lives to the debt they owe us."

Up toward the lamasery men in blue and white uniforms were advancing. From the lower gate lamas hurriedly arrayed in gleaming silks paraded toward the approaching Chinese.

McClure, at Sawn Ko's side at the window, said grimly: "Now that you have satisfied your curiosity, are we any better off? How do you expect to explain away the dead men?"

"My order from Kingsley *sahib* was

that our mission was to be carried out, but at no cost to you if I could prevent it. So! We now have three less enemies and two good rifles, and we are going to find a better place to stay than here. O *sahib*, if we do anything, it must be quickly done! For the time we have been forgotten; the lamas are busy elsewhere. I have done my part—do you do yours."

McClure still thought the Gurkha had been unnecessarily precipitate, but that was past. He remembered how they had come to the isolated room: the narrow hall, the great interior chamber of the lamasery below, lined with gods, devils and demons, a place of silk hangings and banners, of skull cups and many prayer wheels . . .

"Strip them," he said, nodding toward the dead men.

"We are actors," Sawn Ko grinned. "Why not?"

Sawn Ko became the lama, two other Gurkhas the Chinese infantrymen.

"We go down the hall," McClure commanded. "If we are seen, we may be able to continue. If we are stopped—well, we will all do the best we can. And we must stay together. If we can get to the great chamber, we will find a place to hide and see what we see."

"So be it," Sawn Ko agreed.

IT WAS a harebrained attempt, and every one of them knew it. The dead men were left where they lay, there being no place to hide them. Down the narrow hall they went, escorted by the "Chinese." One lama scurried past them, but although every Gurkha was ready to let the breath and life out of him if he raised his voice, all went well.

The great chamber was empty also, save one ancient lama; Sawn Ko edged toward the praying figure, but McClure held his arm.

"He does not see us," he whispered.

The old lama was blind.

McClure led the Gurkhas along the edge of the silent room, and picked a place behind the great altar where all were easily concealed behind the thick silken hangings. Only very sacred lamas—and very old ones—would come near the altar; it should prove the safest hiding place. If they were discovered, there was no way of escape, but at least their backs were to a wall, and that would help—for a time.

If McClure knew anything of Tibetan customs, the arriving party would be taken directly to the great chamber. Then—what? Something, for lamaseries were not emptied of priests for an ordinary event, nor were conchs blown save for important happenings.

Sawn Ko examined his rifle, grumbling at the rust spots; the other Gurkhas waited patiently, revolvers out, dancing costumes arranged so they could get at their wicked *kukris* without delay. McClure already cursed his decision, and yet felt he had been given no choice after Sawn Ko's ridiculous action.

While his uneasy anger grew, the chamber began at last to fill with many men, and the muttering of the blind priest at his prayers could no longer be heard. What McClure did hear, turning him cold, was a familiar, oily voice—Chang-li. What the *amban* said, McClure did not know, but the suave, contented tone made it appear that the Chinese had not been told of the arrival of the troupe of players.

Butter lamps were lighted, and the chamber rocked to the whirling of prayer wheels; when a voice began to boom a speech of welcome McClure carefully looked out.

He had expected to see Chang-li and his escort of north-Chinese soldiery, but with them were Tibetan nobles and high priests. More than a casual visit was in the air. Ceremonial scarfs were being exchanged, and then a gaunt lama from Lhasa, in flowing yellow robes, began to speak. It was a long winded affair. The Lhasan spoke of the *Kyam-gon Rim-poche*, the Precious Protector; the *Buk Gye-ya*, Great Inmost Sovereign; and then McClure stifled an ejaculation as the Lhasan brought out the five seals of power of Tibet, and with it the sign of the Dalai Lama—the Golden Seal of the Rainbow

and the Earth; red, square, jewel studded.

"And so with this sign we ask the gods to give us our new Dalai Lama," the Lhasan cried. "A ruler for the land, a Holder of the Thunderbolt. We have come to sacred Gyantzor, where no white man has ever desecrated our altars, to be out of sight of the spies of the Lion of the South, and under our new Dalai Lama we will soon drive the Lion into a sea of blood from which he can not swim."

The lamas shouted wildly, exultantly. Sawn Ko's grip on his rifle tightened, but McClure did not move.

Chang-li was on his feet.

He spoke of China's friendship for Tibet. He had, he said, reached the golden ears of gods, and with their assistance had brought a hundred soldiers to help drill the army of Tibet. More would come when the day arrived when the Lion was to be driven into the sea. He was so wordy and flowery that at last a fervid Tibetan screamed:

"The wheel of life! The wheel of life!"

Lamas approached the altar, pushed aside skull cups and drums and sputtering butter lamps, and from behind the altar—not six inches from McClure's eyes—lifted a heavy gold prayer wheel. The lamas shouted—

"Great wheel of life!"

And one, exalted, fell in a fit. The only calm persons in the chamber were Chang-li and the blind old lama.

Another priest brought long pieces of blank, silky paper to the altar, dipped a brush into a skull ink pot, and then looked up.

A grave stranger from western Tibet, who had been for days at the lamasery, intoned:

"Write down the name of Tasho-ren. Our candidate for Dalai Lama was named by the oracle of Ne-Chung. He was found in a hut beside a mountain shaped like an elephant. He—"

The lama with the brush repeated, "Tasho-ren," and wrote on a slip of paper.

Another visitor, standing also, cried:

"By the lake named Muli-T'ing lives a baby who is to be our ruler. When we heard of him, we went, and saw the lake rise up and become a mirror, in which we saw his face. After that a strong wind came, and we saw—"

"His name," the Gyantzor lamas demanded.

It was given, and again the lama wrote, placing the slip beside the other. Once more a candidate was suggested, and then Chang-li stood up.

"You have all seen my son," he said. "His legs are marked as the tiger's. His ears are like the elephant's. The imprint of a conch shell is on the palm of his hand. When he is Dalai Lama—if the gods choose him—he will know the exact moment when the slaves of the south rise against the white men, and he will lead you against them also, and the Lion will be no more. He will—"

"The son of Chang-li! The son of Chang-li!"

The lama wrote on a fourth piece of paper, and then the audience became tense. McClure, eyes ever for Chang-li, saw how the *amban* squatted at ease, satisfied as if the test were over.

ONE by one, slowly, ceremoniously, the slips of paper were placed in the prayer wheel, and then it was whirled madly about. At the end, when it had stopped turning, it was set down on the altar, and the head lama of Gyantzor, holding up his hand, began to pray earnestly. Every head was bent as he began; from the way some of the lamas settled themselves it seemed to McClure that the invocation was to be long.

Chang-li's head was dutifully down; only the blind lama stared straight before him, his blank eyes seemingly directed at the altar.

McClure bit his lip, looked once at Sawn Ko, and then cautiously slid his hand through the curtain, keeping it, and his arm, below the level of the altar. It was slow business; he dared not let the hangings move. At any moment the lama might stop, and every eye rise. If that

happened, and he withdrew his arm quickly, all would see the silks rustle.

His exploring fingers touched the prayer wheel at last, turned it slowly. It gave a little clicking sound, lost as the lama prayed. McClure fumbled to find an opening; found a button of turquoise, and slowly pushed on it.

The prayer wheel was in plain view; the blind lama had his face set toward it. Other lamas, tiring of devout attitude, might be looking up, but McClure took that chance.

Into the prayer wheel he thrust his hand, taking out what met his fingers. Leaving the aperture open, he snaked his arm behind the curtain again, and then bent over the slips.

Each one was inscribed with the name of Chang-li's son, Li-Tsao-kun.

Sawn Ko, bending close, looked at the papers and, without knowing what was written, recognized that the writing on each was alike.

No wonder Chang-li was satisfied with whatever decision the gods gave!

The interminable praying continued; McClure fought for something which would work. Take all the papers out? The show would only be repeated, and the result be the same; more, the cause of the vanished slips would be investigated as soon as the credulous lamas no longer believed divine power had destroyed them. Write down another candidate's name? On every slip? Impossible. McClure couldn't do it, even if he remembered what they were.

But—how did a fellow write "devil"? A downstroke, a curve, a loop and then a vertical final stroke. The word was in every temple. Yes, that was the way to do it! And what did his coolies do when he paid them? Sign a receipt, of course. How? He wrote their names, and they put under that "marked by" and some crisscross scratch.

McClure had his pouch open, and the black dye out of it. While the head lama pleaded with the gods to give them the true Dalai Lama, the white man, with a bit of silk cut by Sawn Ko's knife from his belt—a bit of silk twisted to a point, wrote carefully after "Li-Tsao-kun", on each slip, "marked by the devil".

He did not wait to examine them; the dye went into the soft paper instantly and dried. If the characters were dissimilar from the ones written by the lama, it could not be helped. Back into the prayer wheel went the slips.

Actually, "Li-Tsao-kun, marked by the devil", was hardly better than stealing the slips. But it should certainly start a diversion, ending—how?

McClure, glancing at the grim Gurkhas, was suddenly eager to find out.

"Well?" Sawn Ko breathed.

"We have done what we could," said McClure in a whisper.

"Then let us go," said Sawn Ko. With his finger he pointed along the wall behind them.

It was gray, but not invisible; light came from the east, where the hangings must have ended. In single file, whatever noise they made covered by the fervor of the priest, they moved toward the soft light, in single file.

There was no sense in staying at Gyantzor. Chang-li would remember the troupe, would know there was reason why they had hastened the shortest way to Gyantzor. To attempt finding Chang-li's son, the intended Dalai Lama, was impossible. The only thing to do was hope that the added words on the slips would remove him as a candidate; that all of the slips bore his name, in the lama's own writing, would surely complicate matters.

Cautiously, silently, keeping carefully away from the hangings, the Gurkhas and McClure worked along the wall; they were at the corner, with a door to the outside—the next courtyard—before them when the lama's voice ceased, and the others howled to have the wheel of life opened.

McClure, safety before him, could not have left unless the Gurkhas had carried him away.

Every back was to them; the wheel of life was held high, and then the head lama shouted a name. The blind old priest was helped to the altar and, his sightless

eyes turned for all to see, ordered to thrust his hand into the wheel and draw out the name of the new Great Ruler.

In went his hand; the slip he drew out was seized by the head lama.

While all waited breathlessly, the chief of the lamasery began to choke, and his face turned paler than ever in his life.

"Devils!" he moaned. "Devils!"

Chang-li was on his feet.

"Read!" he screamed.

"I cannot!" the lama whispered.

And then Chang-li, murderous since he knew something had gone amiss, rushed through the lamas and seized the slip. Unconsciously he spoke what he saw—

"Li-Tsao-kun, marked by the devil. A lie, a lie!" he howled. He turned to the priest who had written the names. "You wrote it so! The Lion has paid you, but my bite will be worse. You—"

"I wrote what you told me," the lama whimpered. "On every slip the name of—"

Chang-li struck him across the mouth.

THE GAUNT noble from Lhasa, keener than the others, stared at the *amban;* he said a word to his companions, and they began to draw away from the Chinese and the Gyantzor lamas. Chang-li ran to the hangings and tore them down, but found only a blank wall facing him.

Sawn Ko whispered to McClure:

"Well done, *sahib.* Now if you and my men will start away, I have another order to execute, for the man who saved my life. Kingsley *sahib* has had enough of this Chinese slug, and I do not blame him. I will give you as much time as I can before I—"

"We go together," McClure snapped.

The Gurkha said—

"I was told to keep you safe, but—well, you are a man, and I would do the same."

He hissed a word to the Gurkhas, who stripped off their costumes and, half naked, waited. McClure, seeing that they were ready to run, tucked his silk gown through his belt.

"What now?" he asked.

"Let us see the play acted out," Sawn Ko told him. "Surely one of us will get to Kingsley *sahib* and relate the tale to him. You—you are sure you will not start, brother-in-arms, before I do what I do?"

McClure shook his head.

"So be it."

Chang-li was screaming wildly now, and the Lhasans shouted back at him; the *amban* wanted the test again, and the others were willing, but insisted that they see the names written on the slips. Chang-li's men were gathered about him, as if the Chinese intended to force what he could not achieve otherwise. He held up his hand to deliver his order, certain that the Gyantzor lamas would bear him out; he lifted his hand, stared imperiously about the chamber, and then gasped.

Sawn Ko, smiling, had stepped from behind the curtain. Chang-li could not have known what the Gurkha was until Sawn Ko roared tauntingly in English:

"Yellow man! Yellow dog!"

Heads could not turn as fast as the Gurkha fired.

Out of the doorway, away from the great chamber of devils and prayer wheels, the party raced, Sawn Ko only a jump in the rear. At the end of the courtyard, when the first shots sped wildly after them, two of the Gurkhas turned, stood stockstill and dispassionately pressed trigger.

Two screams, horribly blended together, told how accurate they had been.

McClure ran with the others, suiting his longer legs to the Gurkhas' jerky strides. The din behind them was terrific. Chang-li's death had spurred the amazed Chinese escort to revenge. With them had rushed the Tibetan escorts who, far in the rear, fired at nothing with their ancient weapons. When the party neared the covered passageway under the wall several curious Chinese soldiers, stationed there as guards, stepped out to see what was the trouble, and what excitement they were missing.

They never learned. The Gurkha *kukris* hacked the life from them before

they were able to fire a single shot.

Four guards—four more rifles . . .

But when the Gurkhas stooped to pick up the weapons, and jerk the bandoleers from the dead Chinese, Tibetans placed on one of the towers came to life, and sent great rocks crashing down. Gam K'aw'ti had a smashed hand from one; several of the Gurkhas were bruised, but none had stopped a rock with his head.

Down, valley-ward, the white man and his companions raced. Now that they were in the open, they presented fair marks. Alaw Bhom snarled as a bullet ploughed through his shoulder, but never faltered. Another of the *raj's* warriors suddenly leaped high, arms outstretched like a runner breasting the tape, and then fell in a jerking heap to the earth. McClure, stopping, seized the Gurkha, and ran with him a full hundred yards before realizing that the brown soldier was dead.

"We fight—better than—we run," Sawn Ko panted to McClure.

The chase was hot. The Gurkhas were unable to outdistance the pursuers; nor did they dare, outnumbered as they were, to stop and return the fire. One already had a bloody cheek where a bullet had furrowed it; one was dead; Alaw Bhom was losing blood rapidly and managed to keep up with increasing difficulty. The end seemed inevitable; they would be run to earth if they kept on, and surrounded and destroyed at leisure if they made a stand. Because there was nothing else to do, they continued running downhill toward the valley, and the Chinese, seeing such a type of chase which was hurting them none, cheered as they pursued.

McClure was gray under the black dye. Never in his life had he run—yet there was nothing else to do. Over rocks and rubble they went, breaths coming hard and fast. When Alaw Bhom gasped—

"I can—go—no more!" Sawn Ko jerked out his *kukri* to prevent the Gurkha from falling into the Chinese' hands alive. But just then McClure cried:

"We're at—the bottom. Over there—rocks!" He slung the failing Gurkha to his shoulder.

The Gurkhas gasped out fierce and willing agreement. In another moment they were behind heaps of stones and rocks—behind a Tibetan *chorten*, where prayers could be said, and over which dirty white prayer flags flapped.

Sawn Ko, rifle cuddled carefully, began to hum:

> "Tighten your belt, little son!
> Grow up and shoulder your gun!"

And with that, happily, dropped the foremost Chinese soldier. Then, swiftly, he arranged his men, so that the *chorten* was guarded on all sides. They had six rifles, six filled bandoleers.

AFTER one attempted rush, the combined Tibetan-Chinese force stopped. It had cost them exactly a half dozen of their number.

"Soon," said Sawn Ko joyfully, "we will even matters, and then we will attack."

McClure looked up, where the sun was already nearing the hills.

"Soon," he said quietly, "the sun will be gone, and if they do not come and drive us out, we will freeze."

The half naked Gurkhas did not care.

"Plenty will go with us when we die," they assured McClure.

"I am glad to remain here," Sawn Ko admitted, after sending a bullet through a sniper's head and ejecting the cartridge. "I promised Kingsley *sahib* that you would return unhurt, and that is something I can not manage."

"Perhaps we can get away when it is dark," McClure said. Then, as quietly, "It is no fault of yours, Sawn Ko. If we stay, we are killed. If we go, even undetected, we will freeze to death before we are over the pass." He stopped, waited until Sawn Ko's rifle no longer moved, until discharge and cry of agony came almost at the same instant, and then went on, "But there is always the chance, if

we hold them off until dark, that we may find a village in the valley and get clothing and food. So—"

"Tighten your belt!" Sawn Ko sang.

Until the shadows crept down from the lamasery, the Chinese were content with keeping up a fire from all sides; when it abated, with quiet stealing into the vale, the Gurkhas, with knowing little nods to one another, drew their *kukris* and placed them where they could be easily reached.

McClure's own heart began to pound as they waited, and then, out of the shadow near the *chorten*, he saw a creeping figure. He fired, and knew that he had missed, but a Gurkha's rifle did what his automatic had not. An instant after the two shots the valley became horrible with fierce cries. Before he actually realized what had happened McClure saw a yellow face rise from the rocks and, pointblank, fired. The face vanished; another took its place . . .

The Gurkhas fought joyously. Once the Chinese and Tibetans were close enough, their *kukris* slashed and cut; savagery possessed them, the cunning of devils. They crept about like cats, protecting each other at the last possible moment, shouting encouragement when McClure, catching fire from them, smashed down a gigantic Tibetan at the instant the other was swinging an ax for Sawn Ko's head.

In another second it was over; those in the rear, seeing how their mates pressed back after the first taste of the Gurkha's knives, backed away also, and set up a fire, from behind rocks, which the Gurkhas laughed at.

Five dead Chinese were either hanging over the rocky rampart or had been killed inside; a Gurkha reported that another was just over the edge.

McClure, in the gathering darkness, looked at the padded trousers and jackets and, before he could say a word, Sawn Ko read his thoughts:

"They are warm," he said. "We will not freeze. But how can we tell friend from foe if we become dressed as the Chinese?"

McClure only said:

"If they attack again, we will have enough. If they do not—"

The Gurkha leader, looking out carefully while bullets sang over his head or spattered against the rocks, said:

"Is that all which troubles you? When it is dark we will get you a few more uniforms—and the bullets, also, which is more important—without any trouble at all."

The attackers kept shouting and blazing away at nothing. Once a bullet zigzagged between rock and lodged in a Gurkha's knee; all that he said was—

"I will show my sons where a flea has bitten me," and paid no more attention to it.

Like the defenders of the *chorten*, the Chinese and Tibetans seemed content to wait for nightfall. When it finally came, brush fires, to which heaps of yak dung were added, flared up behind the Chinese. Taunting laughs as the blue clad soldiers ate and drank, always behind sheltering rocks, only made the Gurkhas the grimmer. When night set in blackly, and the edge of the moon slid like the top of a helmet from Tsang-ki-ro, Sawn Ko beckoned to a Gurkha.

"We are two coats short, O bloody minded son of my cousin," he said. "Could you get them for us?"

It was getting cold; in another hour it would be icy, even before the chilling night wind began to howl through the valley. The Gurkha, nodding, slipped off what remained of his dancing costume until he was stark naked and, *kukri* in hand, left the *chorten*.

McClure tried to watch the gliding dark body, but lost it before the Gurkha was ten feet from the rocks.

"If they come again, we will have plenty of clothes," McClure said, when he was tired of waiting and his nerves were on edge.

"My cousin's son was delighted to go," Sawn Ko told the white man. "And they will not attack again. Why should they? Here we are, without food, without water, without covering. They, in our places, would sue for surrender; they believe we

are like them in mind. They will wait for us to be exhausted, and then, like the brave men they are, attack—and find—"

"Nothing." McClure grinned.

"It depends on what success Ch'o Kwok has, and what he learns," temporised the Gurkha.

LAUGHTER came to them, laughter and taunts and, whenever a Chinese felt like it, shots against the rock. When the bell at the lamasery beat, the Tibetans, thus spurred to bravery, fired a ragged volley, but one which from their ancient weapons made the night ring.

The echo was in the air when Ch'o Kwok slid over the rampart so noiselessly that he spoke before even his mates knew he had returned.

"What luck?" Sawn Ko demanded.

"It was so easy that I felt sorry for them," the Gurkha replied. "Here are the two uniforms. I could have had a dozen for the taking. They have no liking for our aim, Sawn Ko. They are well hidden, all of them. Behind rocks. I killed my men both behind the same one, and the second continued to talk about some woman or other, or so I guessed from his lewd eyes, even while I thrust my knife into the first. I gave him a chance to open his mouth, but killed him before he could cry out. I—"

"I—I—I," Sawn Ko mocked. "What else?"

"They eat and drink and smoke," said the Gurkha. "I have crept clear around our position. I could take out my whole village without their knowing it. Only—the *sahib* is a white man. Can he go silently?"

"We will bind clothes about his shoes," Sawn Ko decided. Then, "But he would hit his gun against a rock—*sahibs* always do—so we will take his gun away. He must go directly behind you, Ch'o Kwok, so that if we are discovered he will be in the lead and may have a chance. Then—"

"What are you talking about?" McClure demanded.

"Hold up your foot," said the Gurkha, and began to wind cloth about it. "We have waited here long enough, *sahib;* we are going elsewhere."

The Gurkhas, with strips of cloth, bound the uniforms in bundles, and each swung one over the buttocks. McClure, already in Chinese uniform, was the only member of the party who, in the icy night, was clothed.

Sawn Ko explained earnestly to the white man what was necessary. He must creep no faster than Ch'o Kwok. He must avoid rocks. He must follow Ch'o Kwok absolutely.

"We are ready," Sawn Ko said then, softly. "Let us go home."

McClure knew that the word had a double meaning.

Over the rim of the rock *chorten* went the Gurkha. McClure, teeth clenched together, so careful that the sweat started, crept after him; every Gurkha stiffened as the clumsier white man dislodged a rock—no shouts, no bullets—and then followed. Along the ground they crept and crawled, very slowly. McClure's eyes strained to see twigs, pebbles . . . First to the right, then to the left, then farther left, actually toward a fire—but in shadow where they could not be seen—the Gurkha led the way. Slowly, but steadily, evenly, the brown soldier advanced. What happened next, as they approached a big boulder, McClure did not know. Something metallic struck against rock and, almost at once, a Chinese loomed high above them, staring into the darkness.

The Gurkhas froze. Ch'o Kwok's blade flickered up; but the Chinese, sensing what he did not see, jumped sidewise.

The Chinese had one instant in which to decide whether to fire his rifle—at nothing—or cry out; he stupidly did neither, and then McClure, swinging from his knees and coming half erect with the blow, cracked him behind the ear. Ch'o Kwok let the Chinese drop on the point of the *kukri* before easing him to the ground.

All the noise had been the smash of fist against bone, of the swish of McClure's padded uniform as he rose; behind the rock a Chinese asked a question, and was told that Seng-Shun probably had gone to get more of that delicious mutton to bring them . . .

After that fright it was easy. The Gurkhas at last rose to their feet and walked swiftly away from the fires. Soon Sawn Ko stopped, and all drew on the padded uniforms.

"I warned you, but it was I who made the noise," Sawn Ko apologized to McClure. He fingered something now covered by the uniform. "It was a special charm against *nats* and other devils," he said. "I bent low, and it touched a rock. I am going to get another charm, for that one tried to send me to the devil. Your blow was well struck, *sahib*. It saved us all."

"It was time I did something," said McClure.

Sawn Ko grinned at him.

"Without you," he announced, "we would have fought our way into the lamasery, and never lived to fight it out again. As it is, Chang-li has gone to join his dogs of ancestors, and his son will make no trouble for us now. The boy means nothing. Chang-Li would have used him. With Chang-Li dead, the youngster is no more important than any other brat in Tibet. But, strangest of all, we are alive."

McClure thought of the Gurkha who had been killed.

"Not all of us," he said.

"He is with the *Karai Kasang*, who is glad that he died like a man. And that is all any of us can ask. Do we want to live until we are gnarled and hairy like monkeys, and have our grandchildren laugh at us?"

McCLURE, in proper whites, asked of Kingsley—

"How do you know all that, old man?"

"Had a runner in nearly every town along the border," the commissioner told him. "No way of knowin' where you'd cross it, Mac. He started for Calcutta—that is, to relay word—just as soon as you came. I understand that Sawn Ko had a finger or two frozen."

McClure sipped a long drink.

"It was pretty cold," he admitted. "Hope it doesn't get you into a mess—although the Chinese'll be blamed for it—but we had to rob a few villages on the way to get food."

"Merely even matters up a bit. We owe that north China lot of brigands a bit already. Er—by the way, after you left Mehelis, supposed to be headed this way, and then out of the country, we had a demand to allow some home company to exploit the Tsang-ko-ri hills for oil. That's probably what your own concern heard about, when we told them we might need your help. I understand—you needn't know how—that Chang-li told this other rival company about it, and that he's promised them complete reports. He even said that he would—er—arrange matters with Tibet in case the oil was over the border."

"Not he," McClure said. "He's dead."

"That's what I thought . . . How about tellin' me the whole yarn, Mac? You must have had a rotten time of it—but you look fit."

"Wouldn't have missed going for the world," answered McClure. "It was great. Do I go back and finish my job?"

"You stop what might have turned rebellion into revolution, and all you think of is your job!"

McClure, seriously, said:

"There's been a lot of revolutions, but the wheel of life's very much the same all the way round. I'll tell you about the wheel. It—"

"I want the other story. Of Chang-li—Gyantzor."

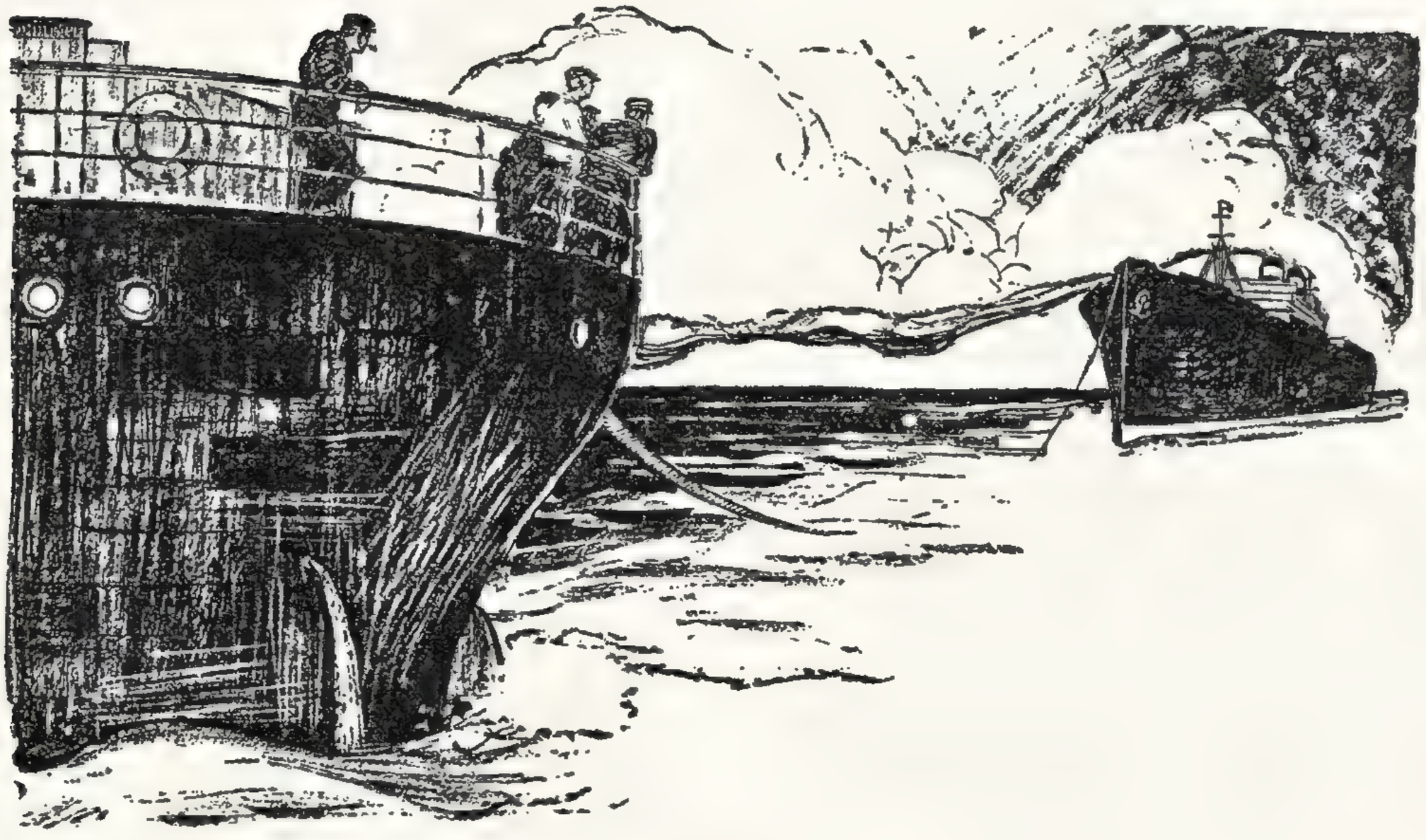
"Same story. It seems funny now, but it wasn't then." McClure smiled.

"You can't stay away so long again, Yank," Kingsley said. "How about comin' down for the tiger shootin'?"

"I'll come," agreed McClure. "Only it'll seem pretty tame—now."

SQUARING *the* CIRCLE

By GRAHAM THOMPSON



A Story of the China Seas and a Sailorman's Jinx

YESTERDAY James Munro was merely a retired master mariner; today he was a shipowner, with one ship in his fleet, the eight hundred ton coasting steamer *Mongolian*. Julius Van Dyke, the East Indian born Hollander who sold him the boat, considered the six thousand pounds sterling he received for her as easy money. Certainly the *Mongolian* had been a good handy coaster in her day, bringing in to Van Dyke sufficient money to allow him to purchase a larger and more modern vessel and then leave behind a good surplus. But from the day the Dutchman had decided to replace her by a larger vessel the old *Mongolian* had started her downward path of deterioration until, by the time she was offered for sale, she had reached a stage where, due to a thorough and systematic skimping of repairs and upkeep of her engines and boilers, it would take one quarter of what the vessel was worth to put her into condition.

That was the time Van Dyke unloaded her on to James Munro as a sound, handy, good going coasting steamer. Munro had owned a vessel before, but that was a

bark, the *Skipjack*, in which he had plied a trade in the China Sea for many years until she was driven ashore on the Parcel Reefs in a typhoon and lost. She had made money for him, and with what he had saved, together with the insurance he collected, he decided, after a considerable spell of retirement on shore, to venture into steam.

As a windjammer seaman Munro was like other men who have spent their lifetime under tall spars and billowing canvas. He considered that, having mastered the art of handling a maze of rigging and towering masts with ponderous yards, and being qualified to pass judgment on anything from the seizing on a mast coat to the earring of a main royal, the matter of inspecting a steel hull, with two short, straight masts and a stumpy funnel, that was pushed through the water by a clanking engine, was one that presented no difficulties whatsoever. So it was, that when he viewed the *Mongolian* prior to purchase, he passed a critical and experienced eye over the hull, decks, masts, and all appurtenances thereto and passed judgment thereon without any effort.

Engines and boilers, however, were things in which he was not particularly interested. He had heard that the average life of a boiler was twenty-five years, and that engines would last practically forever; and, as the vessel was only in her fifteenth year, he considered there was nothing to worry about in that direction. So, when Van Dyke led the way down the engine room, Munro gazed around without even a show of lukewarm enthusiasm. He noticed that certain movable parts of the machinery were bright and shiny, and also that small auxiliaries had recently been given a coat of bright green paint which he thought looked very well against the buff colored bulkheads of the engine room.

He also noticed, when Van Dyke raised the door of one of the furnaces in the port boiler, that it was fitted with a continuous row of grate bars; and that on the outside of the boilers there were steam and water gages. And at that point he informed Van Dyke he was satisfied everything was in order in that quarter and he would go back to the deck and have a final look at things of more importance. After all, the whole job was nothing near so intricate as inspecting a square rigged vessel with its mass of rigging, and spars, and thousands of square feet of canvas that a steamboat man knew nothing at all about. For a full hour more he wandered round the deck, feeling this thing, and looking at that, until there was nothing left to be examined.

He muttered to himself that she looked all right. She could do with a coat of paint, of course, but the outlay of a few pounds would cover that, and then he guessed he would have a nice, handy little vessel.

"Good, sound ship, Captain," said Van Dyke in his guttural voice when they returned to the cabin for a final talk. "Hull and decks in splendid condition."

"They look all right," replied Munro.

"And the engines and boilers as good as the day they were put in."

The other nodded.

"Dirt cheap at the price," added the Dutchman, offering a cigar. "In a way I'm sorry to part with her. She's been a good money-maker for me, and only that she's a bit small for my requirements I wouldn't let her go."

And so the deal was closed. The steamship, *Mongolian*, of British registry, eight hundred tons gross, compound engines and two single ended boilers working at a pressure of one hundred and fifty pounds, passed, with the signing of the necessary papers and a check for six thousand pounds sterling, from the ownership of Julius Van Dyke to that of James Munro.

AN HOUR later Van Dyke walked into the Raffles Hotel in high spirits and ordered a sumptuous dinner together with a large bottle of old vintage champagne.

"Thank God, she's off my hands," he said to himself with relief, settling his bulky form in a large wicker chair. "That's

the best piece of business I've done for a long time. One thousand pounds on to the price I got for that scrap heap will pay for my new *Java Queen*."

And, while the Dutchman ate, drank and made merry over his profitable but shady deal, James Munro gave a last look of pride at his new acquisition as he stepped into a *sampan* and proceeded on shore to fix up a crew and make speedy arrangements for the *Mongolian* to begin a busy and fruitful life. He would captain his own ship, as he had done in the *Skipjack*, make his own charters and contract his own business, thereby saving the commissions that otherwise would go into the pockets of brokers and agents.

The new owner of the *Mongolian* was by no means a pompous man, but there was just the slightest show of importance in his status as owner when three days later he climbed the gangway ladder and stepped on to the deck with the ship's clearance papers under his arm and a charter party in his pocket whereby the *Mongolian* was hired to carry a cargo of rice from Saigon to Singapore at a very favorable rate.

"All ready to go, Mr. Blake?" he asked of the young Englishman he had engaged as mate.

Mr. Blake shook his head.

"We're all ready on deck, sir," he said. "But the chief engineer reported a few minutes ago that the condenser's leaking and he won't be ready to start for some time."

"What condenser?" queried the skipper impatiently. "I told him to be ready to move at ten o'clock. There's a canceling date on my charter and we've got to go, condenser or no condenser. I've got it all figured out and if we leave this morning and steam full speed we'll arrive at Saigon with just two days in hand, and that's not allowing for any head winds we may run into."

The young mate glanced at the skipper's set features and saw he was ready for a strong argument.

"Shall I send the chief up to see you, sir?" he asked diplomatically.

"Right away," snapped Munro. "We've got to get under way; then he can fool around this condenser thing as long as he likes."

He walked to his cabin under the navigating bridge and paced the floor impatiently until the grimy form of the chief engineer, in brown overalls sodden with perspiration, stood within the doorway.

"What's this I hear about a condenser?" he asked, pausing in his walk.

"It's leaking like an old watering can, Captain. Leaky tubes and leaky doors. Squirting water all over the engine room."

"Well, a little clean salt water won't hurt you or your engine room, will it? And you've got pumps to pump it out, haven't you? We've got to get away, mister. There's a canceling date on my charter."

Mr. Atkins stared at the skipper in bewilderment for a moment as he wiped his grimy face with a handful of greasy cotton waste.

"It's not a matter of pumping out, Captain," he said, after a lengthy pause. "With leaky tubes we can't keep the feed in the boilers."

"What feed?"

"Fresh water feed, sir. If we allow salt water to get into the boilers the furnace crowns will be down in quick time, and we'll be lucky if the boilers don't blow up."

"Humph," grunted the skipper disgustedly.

The relation of a condenser to a boiler was like so much Greek to the sailing ship master, who rubbed his chin thoughtfully as he vainly sought for a suitable reply.

"But Van Dyke assured me that everything was in fine working order," he blurted out, at length.

Mr. Atkins made no reply; his face merely cracked into a smile through its coating of grime and grease.

"Well, get busy and fix the thing up if we can't possibly go without it," added Munro very peevishly. "We haven't a minute to waste."

"Right, sir. I'll just put wooden plugs in the ends of the leaky tubes for the time being but they'll have to be renewed at Saigon, or maybe before. She's in bad shape down there, Captain."

Captain Munro walked away in silence. He spent the next four hours making frequent visits between his cabin and the top of the engine room, where he gazed down the skylight with expectant and anxious eyes. But all he could see was the bent backs of the engineers as they labored at their task, and all he heard was the banging of steel tools on the floor plates and the voice of Mr. Atkins rasping out orders in pidgin English to the Chinese firemen assisting in the work. He hadn't the remotest idea whether the work would be completed in one hour, or two, as he went back to his cabin to retrace his steps to and fro across the floor, his hands clasped behind his back, his head bent down in a gloomy manner. And he was still pacing back and forth when, at four in the afternoon, Mr. Atkins reported he was ready to start.

"About time," growled the skipper, stepping out of his room and jumping nimbly up the ladder to the bridge. "Heave away the anchor," he yelled to the mate, already standing on the forecastle head.

There was an almost deafening hissing of steam from wornout glands, and a bang and clank of connecting rods whose bearing brasses were nearly worn through to the steel, as the rusty chain rolled slowly in over the wildcat.

"Hell of a racket," growled Munro to himself, taking short, quick steps across the bridge, impatiently snapping his fingers and keeping his eyes fixed on the forecastle head until he received the signal from Mr. Blake that the anchor was aweigh. Then he strode over to the engine room telegraph and slammed the handle down to full speed ahead.

Almost immediately there came from the direction of the engine room skylight a roar of escaping steam that almost froze the blood in his veins. He grasped the bridge rail in both his hands with a grip that made the knuckles show white as he gazed aft with suspicion of fear in his eyes. But nothing happened, the hissing gradually died away until it ceased altogether leaving only the clankity-clank of the engines as the *Mongolian* slowly gathered headway and wound a passage through the shipping of the harbor, swung round the end of the backwater, and headed up for Horsboro Light.

SOOTHED by the rhythmic throbbing beat of the propeller, Captain Munro leaned over the wing of the bridge and watched the green water being turned into a bubbling white foam as the coaster pushed her bluff bow through the straits and headed eastward.

He handed over the bridge to Mr. Blake and went below to his cabin where, with paper and pencil, he recalculated the time it would take him to reach his loading port after his delayed start. It was six hundred and forty-nine miles between Singapore and Saigon; the *Mongolian* could steam nine knots—so Van Dyke had told him—and at that rate she should make the passage in three days. That would be the twelfth and the canceling date of the charter was the fourteenth. Yes, it looked quite safe, in spite of the few hours he had already lost. But there was that confounded condenser thing. Well, he hadn't heard anything more about it so it must be fixed up.

But down below, Mr. Atkins was less optimistic.

"A fine heap of junk," he growled to himself, as his eyes wandered from one hissing joint to another. "Shouldn't be surprised to see the whole blasted caboodle collapse on the floor plates before we're twenty-four hours out."

But next morning the engines were still going round although the bang and clank of worn out bottom end brasses and the hissing of steam was almost deafening in the damp, steamy engine room. At eight o'clock Mr. Atkins handed over the watch to the second engineer with a host of technical instructions interspersed with

scathing and uncomplimentary remarks.

"The skipper's got a charter to catch, so nurse her carefully and keep her going while she's in the mood," he shouted finally, as he made his way up the narrow iron ladder to the deck where he was met by Captain Munro hurrying along from the bridge.

"She's not going fast enough, Mr. Atkins, not nearly fast enough," snapped the skipper. "By the bearings of the land she's making a bare seven knots."

"What do you expect her to make?" asked the chief rather coldly.

"Nine, of course. Van Dyke told me she'd do nine knots."

"That Dutchman says a lot of things besides his prayers, Captain."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that the state these engines are in you'll never get nine knots out of this wagon in spite of what Van Dyke told you."

"I don't see that. The engines haven't been changed, and they haven't got any smaller since they've been in the ship, so if she could do nine knots at one time she can do it now! She's got to do it, mister, or I'll lose my charter. Give her more steam, that's all that's necessary. More pressure, just as we have to give a sailing ship more canvas if we want her to go faster."

Mr. Atkins looked at the skipper with a mixed expression of worry and surprise.

"She's your boat, Captain," he said quietly, "and if you order me to give her more pressure I'll do it, but I won't be responsible for what happens."

"I'll take care of the responsibility," retorted Munro authoritatively. "It's child's play to the responsibility of running a windjammer, and that's where I learned my business. Give me nine knots speed, that's what I want."

With this parting shot the skipper stalked back to the bridge, while the chief engineer descended once more to the sizzling engine room.

"Strikes me these blamed steamboats are in the habit of being run by the engineers, not the master," barked the skipper wrathfully to Mr. Blake. "Wants to tell me that she won't do nine knots when Van Dyke distinctly told me she would."

He walked to the wing of the bridge and, leaning over the rail, watched the greenish white water as it slid by the black steel side and listened to the clankity-clank of the engines that seemed to be coming at quicker intervals. She was going faster, he could see it plainly, and his face lighted up with a smile of satisfaction at the thought of winning his first argument with a steamboat engineer, a part of the ship's personnel he considered necessary, but unwelcome.

"They mustn't try to tell me what a ship can do," he said to the mate, and smiled. "I was fooling round big square riggers when those chaps were swinging on the garden gate in short frocks, by cripes. And when it comes to sa—"

A sudden roar and an earsplitting noise of screeching, whistling steam cut off the rest of his words as James Munro ran to the opposite side of the bridge and stared with gaping eyes toward the midship section of the vessel where a cloud of steam swirled upward through the engine room skylight like a dense, thick fog, enveloping the stumpy funnel until it was completely hidden from view. Standing rooted to the spot and unable to speak, he stuffed his stubby fingers into his ears to deaden the noise, his face flushing and paling alternately. Although only a matter of seconds it appeared to Munro like a goodly number of minutes before the screeching died down to a dismal, ghostly groan and finally ceased altogether. It was like the calm after the passing of a howling, screaming squall of short duration and great severity. Everything was silent; not even the clanking of engines broke the stillness of the air, as the *Mongolian*, now barely crawling through the water, lost her steerage way and, swinging beam on to the small, northerly swell, lay rolling like a lifeless thing upon the ocean.

Recovering his composure, Captain Munro stared alternately at the mate and

the Chinese quartermaster standing shivering at the wheel.

"What in hell's gone wrong with that all-fired contraption now," he roared. "It ain't an engine she's got down there, its an infernal explosive machine. She'll have me passing out with heart failure yet, by cripes."

His face flushed with anger he turned to meet Mr. Atkins coming up the ladder, looking about as pleasant as an unfriendly bull terrier.

"Now you see what giving her more steam does," blurted out the chief, none too courteously.

"What's it done?" barked Munro. "Don't stand there asking me riddles."

"It's blown out the HP packing. Lucky somebody wasn't scalded."

Captain Munro scratched his head for a moment in perplexity.

"You mean its blown the packing out of the horsepower?" he asked sharply.

Despite his anger Mr. Atkins' face broke into a broad smile.

"Out of the high pressure cylinder, Captain," he corrected. "Just blew the whole shooting match clean out. I knew it would happen if she got more steam."

"Humph!" grunted the skipper, very little enlightened as to what had actually happened. "You've got more packing, I suppose? How long will it take to put it in?" he asked.

"The best part of three or four hours, Captain. Big job packing the HP. Piston rods all want putting in the lathe. They're full of gaps and scars, and chewing the packing all to hell. She's in bad shape down there."

"You told me that once before, although Van Dyke assured me that everything was in good order. But don't stand here talking; go ahead with the job and get her started again."

IT WAS some three hours later before the new packing was in place and the *Mongolian* once more moved through the water and headed up to her course. Further elaborate calculations by Captain Munro somewhat relieved his disturbed mind when they showed that even at seven knots speed he would still have nearly twenty-four hours in hand for his charter. But there was the weather to consider, and the moods of those engines were a source of worry and uneasiness. Condensers and HP's—he did not know just what part they played in the working of the machinery, but it was evident the *Mongolian* could not go without them. He began to mumble uncomplimentary things about Mr. Julius Van Dyke and wished he had sought out a handy sailing vessel instead of one of these new fangled steamboats that depended on a lot of steel rods and cranks and grimy engineers.

"The old *Skipjack*, with a fresh sou'west monsoon, was far more reliable than this blamed coffee mill," he muttered to himself, lighting his pipe and puffing away gloomily.

But by noon next day his spirits had risen slightly. The coaster had accomplished just over seven knots since the HP incident, and if she continued at that rate she would reach Saigon in time. He hugged the coast to avoid the strength of the current and shaved round the turning points with a bare margin of safety in order to shorten the distance, and at nightfall the situation looked even more hopeful. If only that confounded condenser and the other gadget known as the HP would hold out for another day! He had dreamed about them the previous night and had seen them dancing about near the foot of his bunk in the most fantastic, twisted shapes, while just behind stood the bulky form of Van Dyke, a broad grin upon his flabby features as he waved a bank check wildly through the air. It was all very weird and uncanny, but still, he would hope. If he could only make the charter, the rates were high enough to permit of some repairs after all running expenses of the ship had been paid.

That night he sat in his cabin and listened intently to the clankity-clank of the engines with a persistent fear in his heart that at any moment the sound might

cease. At frequent intervals he would get out of his chair and, walking to the doorway, would count the revolutions with straining ears—thirty-one, thirty-two, thirty-three, until a full minute had passed by the watch he held in his hand. Then back to his seat to listen to the engines' song while he puffed at a wheezy briar pipe until, as the hour of midnight drew near, and his eyes grew heavy with sleep, he rolled into his bunk.

But it seemed that he had been there but just a few short minutes when the voice of Mr. Blake reverberated through the cabin doorway with the apparent power of a first class foghorn.

"She's stopped again, sir."

James Munro was out of his bunk and up on the bridge in a flash. For a few moments he stood staring into the black night until his eyes became accustomed to the darkness, then swore audibly as he discerned the figure of the mate preparing to hoist the two red lights that were to denote the *Mongolian* was no longer under command. Leaning heavily on the rail he cursed Van Dyke, the ship, the condenser, and the HP. Cursed them roundly in a regular deep sea, sailorlike manner, while down in the engine room Mr. Atkins was hurling out similar, but probably more forceful epithets as he finished closing the main stop valve and climbed the ladder to report to the bridge.

"Which one is it this time?" groaned the skipper dismally, as the figure of the engineer sidled toward him in the darkness. "That blasted condenser, or the HP gadget?"

"Neither, Captain," answered the chief. "She's in a different mood tonight and has sheered off the bolts on one side of the thrust block like so many carrots. Half rusted through they were, but covered over with some nice green paint. Oh, but she's a beauty! I'll eat my hat if she ain't!"

"What part of the confounded machine is the thrust block?" inquired the skipper. "Never knew there were any blocks connected with an engine. Is it important?"

"Very important. It takes the whole thrust of the propeller, and if it gets loose you'll find the engines being pushed through into the stokehold."

"And have you any spare bolts?"

"Luckily we have, but it's a big job to put them in. It'll take us the best part of a day to tap out the broken bolts with a hand drill. You'd better anchor if you can, Captain."

"A whole day?" gasped Munro.

"About that, sir, and we'll have to work like mules to get it done in that time."

Captain Munro made no reply but just gave vent to a heavy sigh.

"That Van Dyke sold you a pup, not a steamboat, Captain," added the chief scathingly. "She's been a good job in her day, but he's just let her run all to hell before he sold her; and it'll take the best part of a thousand pounds to put her into shape. She'll have me crazy before we get back to the Straits."

"Do the best you can with her," groaned Munro in a low voice. "The charter's gone now, that's sure. And I only wish I'd never set eyes on the old tub; she'll ruin me completely. Oh, if I could only lay my hands on that big, greasy son of a Dutchman!" He turned to Mr. Blake. "Never mind the red lights," he said. "Jump for'ard and let go the hook. And you won't surprise me if you holler back that the anchor's dropped off the chain. Nothing can surprise me now, except if she was to catch her charter."

AND all through the long hours of what seemed an almost interminable night, while the *Mongolian* lay at anchor close under the land, Captain Munro spent the time making frequent trips between his cabin and the engine room in the hopes that Mr. Atkins would come forward with the news that he could finish the job in less time than he at first anticipated. But when daylight broke, and the chief engineer, begrimed and weary and broken in temper, came up on to the deck for a breath of fresh air, the captain was briefly

and coldly informed that it would be well into the afternoon before he could hope to get under weigh.

Munro's only utterance was a discontented, smothered growl as he walked gloomily back to the bridge.

"Steamer from the south'ard heading this way, sir," the second mate informed him as he reached the top of the ladder.

Munro picked up the glass and looked uninterestedly at the approaching vessel.

"Looking for a salvage job, I suppose," he said, laying down the glass. "Fat chance of getting any salvage out of me, unless they take this jinx of a *Mongolian* for payment. Six thousand pounds sunk in a scrap heap, and a good charter gone to the devil. Business is looking up, I *don't* think," he added with a cynical grin.

The young second mate remained discreetly silent to the skipper's remarks and, picking up the telescope, gazed long and carefully at the other vessel, drawing closer and closer each minute, and headed directly for the *Mongolian*.

"It's Van Dyke's new boat, sir!" he suddenly exclaimed. "The *Java Queen*. I can make out the name quite distinctly on the bow."

The recumbent form of the skipper, leaning disgustedly over the rail of the bridge, straightened out like a steel spring. His lips tightened and his brows lowered to a terrible scowl as he gazed at the young officer.

"Van Dyke!" he barked. "The *Java Queen*, you say! Get—get me— Oh, damnation, you don't happen to have a shotgun with you, Mister, do you? Van Dyke! If I could only lay my hands on that half-boiled Dutchman, I'd pull his flabby neck as long as a giraffe's—the dirty, lowdown, double distilled squarehead."

He raved, swore and stared with rage at the *Java Queen* as she drew nearer and nearer, until the bone in her teeth died away to a mere ripple and, with her engines going full speed astern, she pulled up within hailing distance of the *Mongolian*. Already armed with a megaphone he had grabbed from the wheelhouse, Munro raised it to his mouth and pointed it squarely at the bulky figure of Van Dyke now plainly visible standing in the wing of the bridge.

"Get to hell away from here, you big, Dutch swine!" he roared at the top of his voice.

The vessels were close enough to allow Munro to see the cynical grin that spread over Van Dyke's face as he raised his megaphone to reply.

"D'you want any assistance?" he asked in his gruff, raucous voice.

"No!" yelled back Munro. "And I wouldn't take yours if I did."

"But you're broken down, ain't you, Captain?"

"None of your perishing business whether I am or not," retorted Munro, his face livid with rage.

"Well, I know you ain't lying there to pass away the time. I'll tow you into Saigon for five hundred pounds."

"You'll not tow me at all, you dirty highway robber. Get out of my sight and take the *Java Queen* with you. You're contaminating the ocean around here, you big, fat, dirty end of a deck mop."

Van Dyke only grinned annoyingly.

"Five hundred flat, and a cheap tow at that," he shouted. "Just say the word, Captain, and I'll get hold of you."

"I've said it," howled back the exasperated Munro. "I've told you to get away from here. I can't stand the smell of your fat carcass that's blowing down to leeward. Dig out quick! But let me tell you before you go that I'll get even with you some day, you squareheaded Shylock."

"Very good, Captain, I'll get on my way. But, if you're still lying here next week at this time, don't forget I offered to give you a very cheap tow!"

"And don't forget I refused it," hurled back Munro, as the propeller of the *Java Queen* began to churn up the yellow waters under her counter. Then she moved away from the scene, her whistle booming out three long blasts in an ironical goodby which the *Mongolian* silently ignored.

THE TEMPORARY repairs to the thrust block took the full estimated time and a little over; but even then the coaster was only able to proceed at a reduced speed. And eventually, thirty hours behind the canceling date of her charter, she limped into the port of Saigon and tied up to the dock after her eventful passage. The fears and doubts that were in the mind of Captain Munro were fully assured when an hour later he walked into the charterer's office and reported his arrival. The manager politely but firmly informed him that the agreement was void, owing to the *Mongolian* failing to reach port within the stated time. He listened attentively while Munro gave him the story of the moods of the *Mongolian* and agreed it was unfortunate the engines should have given so much trouble, but—business was business. The coaster could still have the cargo, but the rate would be one-third less than that originally agreed upon. And the manager advised Captain Munro to accept the terms, as cargoes were not offering so well just at that moment.

Thoroughly dejected, the skipper bent over the office table and, with pencil and paper, made fresh calculations at the new figure, the net result of which showed that the total freight earnings would barely clear the running expenses for the trip, leaving nothing for himself or the ship. It was a drastic situation to be in, with nearly all his money sunk in the vessel and the certainty that extensive repairs would have to be made before she could sail on another voyage. Swearing inwardly, he took the paper again and figured it out anew in a different way, but the result was the same. From any angle, the prospect of losing a good sum of money loomed up before him, until it remained only a question of in which way he would lose the least. He had made a bad deal, he realized it now. And finally he concluded that the safest way out of his predicament was to take the offer of the cargo, get the ship back to Singapore and sell her for what he could get before she ran him into further losses.

He looked up from the table.

"I'll take the rice," he said to the manager.

"Very good, Captain," replied the other. "I think you're acting wisely. We'll start loading you right away and give you a good dispatch. We're sorry you missed the charter, very sorry indeed."

That was all.

It was a very gloomy and disappointed owner-captain that returned on board the *Mongolian* early that evening.

"Everything's against me," he growled, as Mr. Atkins met him at the head of the gangway. "Charter's gone, cargoes are scarce, and I've had to agree to carry the original rice at one-third less rate—which will barely pay the running expenses of the ship. I'm getting rid of this tub as soon as we hit Singapore."

"It's a bad business," declared the chief sympathetically. "That big Dutchman ran the ship until he just couldn't run her any longer, and the state those engines are in would break a man's heart. I've no doubt she'd be a handy paying boat if she was properly fixed up, but as I said before, it will take a thousand, and maybe a little more to put her back into shape."

"I've got no thousand to spend on the tub," snapped the skipper. "All my money's sunk in her now, and all I'll get back is what I can get for her. To hell with steamboats, and their condensers, and HP's, and thrust blocks, and Mr. Julius Van Dyke as well," he added, growling as he made his way forward.

"We'll have to have some repairs done here, Captain," Mr. Atkins shouted.

"Just sufficient to take her back to Singapore and not a single thing more," replied Munro, glowering back over his shoulder as he swung round the corner of the deckhouse out of sight.

The charterers were as good as their word. The *Mongolian* was given a good dispatch. And inside of three days she was steaming down the Saigon River toward the open sea, deeply laden with a full cargo of rice, and bound for Singapore.

Two hours after clearing the mouth of the river, when the vessel was well clear of the land, Captain Munro mounted the ladder to the navigating bridge and ordered the helm hard-a-starboard. The Chinese quartermaster swung over the wheel and as Munro leaned leisurely over the rail he watched the ship's head swing clear round the horizon, the full thirty-two points of the compass, making a complete circle in the murky, yellow waters until her bow entered the wake at the point at which she had started and she proceeded to cover the track a second time.

Mr. Atkins, standing on the deck below, watched the swinging stern for a few moments then rushed hurriedly to the bridge. "Steering gear gone out of order?" he asked sharply.

Captain Munro slowly shook his head.

"Steering gear's all right," he replied. "I'm taking the jinx out of the old tub to see if we can't get to Singapore without some of the trouble we had getting up here. Better stay and see how it's done, being as you've only a nodding acquaintance with the sea."

Amazed at the skipper's reply, and swearing inwardly at the waste of time, the chief took up a position by the astonished Mr. Blake and stared with bulging eyes while the coaster completed the second circle and started on the third. And round she went again, practically covering the same track each time, until she had made seven complete turns, when Munro gave the order to steady the helm and pointed the ship's bow toward the center of the ring she had made in the ocean. Then, slamming the telegraph down to full speed astern, he watched as she gathered sternway and backed out over the rim of the circle stern-first, when he changed the order to full ahead and steadied her on her course to the southward.

"There!" he exclaimed, with a show of satisfaction. "We'll see if that will do the old girl any good."

Mr. Atkins and the mate smiled in a sickly manner as the maneuver was completed.

"What's the trick, sir?" asked Mr. Blake.

"No trick," answered the skipper seriously. "Any one can do it if you know how. You steam round in a circle seven times until the jinx becomes dizzy; then head in to the center, back out stern-first over the rim, and leave the jinx in the middle of the circle. Sometimes you can't get rid of the whole of him at the first try; but every little helps."

Mr. Atkins backed down the ladder, smiling broadly, while the mate crept over to the wing of the bridge and, looking out to seaward, tried hard to suppress the giggles that crept into his throat.

And at the end of the first twenty-four hours out the engines of the *Mongolian* still thumped round with their familiar clankity-clank with never a stop in the interval.

"She's in a fine mood just now," remarked Mr. Atkins, leaning over the side and watching the yellow water slide silently by. "Going along like a scalded cat, by gosh!"

The skipper smiled faintly.

"Now she's lost her charter, and about done all the harm she can do, it wouldn't surprise me if she made a non-stop run to Singapore," he said.

"I'm not backing on anything like that, Captain," answered the chief. "I'm surprised she's gone this far without something happening. It's just luck and nothing else that something hasn't gone wrong before now."

"Seven times round in a circle and back out of the middle stern-first," grinned the skipper as he walked away.

BUT if the surprise was great on the first day, it was overwhelming on the second, when the *Mongolian* still kept pushing her bluff bow through the South China Sea, and the engines still beat out their rhythmic clanking noise with a regularity that was nothing short of remarkable. Captain Munro was so elated over her performance that he even reached a point where he entertained the thought that he

might not sell the vessel after all. Now she had got started, she might, with just a few minor repairs, run successfully for some time.

Mr. Atkins had different ideas, however.

"Don't let her fool you, Captain," he said warningly. "There's only two things to do with this packet. Get her engines fixed properly, or get rid of her as quick as you can. The way those engines knock and bang on the worn bearings she's liable to do serious damage to herself at any time. It's all luck, and I can't do much to help her."

Captain Munro listened to Mr. Atkins' words, and was preparing to give his views on the matter when the voice of the second mate interrupted him from the bridge above.

"Steamer on the starboard bow, heading to the south'ard, which we're overhauling pretty fast, sir," he reported.

"Overhauling," said Munro incredulously. "She must be stopped if we are."

He climbed the ladder to the bridge and, picking up the telescope, leveled it at the vessel, now about three miles distant. Just for a moment he gazed through the eye-piece, then closed the glass with a sudden snap.

"It's Van Dyke and the *Java Queen*," he shouted exultantly. "Must be something wrong when we can catch him like this."

He gave an order to the Chinese quartermaster, and the *Mongolian's* head swung slowly round until it pointed directly toward the other vessel. And, as the distance lessened between them, the two black balls denoting the *Java Queen* was not under control were plainly visible from her jumper stay.

Captain Munro called Mr. Atkins to the bridge.

"*Java Queen*—broken down," he said briefly and excitedly. "I'm going to offer to take him in tow. Think we can manage to pull him along behind us?"

Mr. Atkins shook his head in a doubtful manner.

"I don't think so, Captain. It would put an awful strain on the engines; too much for the shape they're in."

"I'm going to hail him, anyway," replied the skipper. "And I'll have a shot at it if he'll take me. You go below and personally superintend the handling of the engines," he added.

A few more minutes brought the *Mongolian* close up on the quarter of the *Java Queen* where Munro canted the head of his vessel in toward the other and backed his engines until she lay within easy hailing distance.

"What's wrong with your new boat, Van Dyke?" shouted Munro, a quiet smile upon his face.

"Struck some submerged obstruction and lost the rudder, but I don't want any assistance from you," came back the reply.

"Lost your rudder, eh? Mighty glad to hear it. Now how about taking you into port?"

"I've told you I don't want your help."

"That's what you say now, Van Dyke, but you might change your mind later. I'll hang around in case you do, anyway. You're not in a very nice position with the Samsung rocks right under your lee and no anchorage."

"I still have my engines and can steam away from them," returned Van Dyke, rather defiantly.

He knew he was lying for he had already made three attempts to steam away from the rocks but on each occasion, with no rudder to control her, the *Java Queen* had swung her bows shoreward bringing her half a mile nearer the danger at each attempt.

"Try it," shouted Munro. "You've got the wind on the port beam and I'll bet you ten to one she cants in toward the land."

Van Dyke knew the contention was right. He also knew that the only hope of saving his vessel from drifting on to that low line of sharp, jagged rocks was by accepting assistance from another vessel; but it was an irony of fate that the only offer should come from the *Mongolian*.

"I'm waiting for something to come along that I can rely on to get me to Singapore," he shouted, after a considerable pause. "The *Mongolian* isn't a ship I can trust to tow me."

Captain Munro's face turned purple with rage.

"You sold her to me as a good, sound vessel," he barked viciously. "But please yourself what you do. There isn't another ship in sight, and if I don't get the job to take you into port I'll hang around and have the pleasure of seeing you hit the rocks. The breeze is freshening, Van Dyke. You're a good half-mile nearer than when I first saw you."

The skipper of the *Java Queen* gave vent to an oath in his own guttural tongue, and Munro grinned annoyingly in return as the Dutchman picked up the glasses and scanned the horizon, anxiously but vainly, for sight of some other vessel.

"Not a thing in sight except ourselves," shouted Munro, with aggravating persistence. "Better make up your mind. It'll be dark in another three hours."

Van Dyke threw down the glasses in his rage.

"How much do you want to tow me to Singapore?" he shouted. "We're only two hundred and fifty miles from the eastern entrance to the Straits."

"Twenty-five hundred pounds flat," answered Munro.

"You're mad," roared back Van Dyke.

"I know I am, you big squarehead. Damned mad you got six thousand pounds out of me for this scrap heap."

"I'll give you five hundred pounds."

"Keep it. It's worth more than that to watch her knock her bottom out on the Samsungs. Twenty-five hundred; that's my price, and a cheap tow at that. Better hurry up, as the nearer you get to those rocks, the higher goes my price."

Captain Van Dyke left the wing of the bridge and gazed anxiously toward the danger under his lee. He would have one more try to get away from them and jumping to the telegraph he slammed it down to full speed. The water churned under the stern of the *Java Queen*. Slowly she moved ahead. And, as Van Dyke gazed toward the bow with staring eyes, her head swung in toward the land. With a hissing curse he rang down the order to stop.

Munro noticed the effort and sidled his vessel closer.

"I told you what she'd do," he yelled. "You've no more chance of keeping clear than you have of going to heaven when you die, and that's none."

"I'll take your offer," yelled Van Dyke. "Get hold of me."

"Put it down on paper with your name to it," shouted the other. "I've been bitten by you before and I'm taking no chances. I'll send my boat over for the agreement."

THE QUARTER boat was lowered into the water and, in charge of the second mate, pulled over to the side of the *Java Queen*, where the signed paper was lowered down on the end of a heaving line. A few minutes later Captain Munro smiled broadly as he read it aloud on the bridge of the *Mongolian:*

> "I hereby agree to pay to the master of the *Mongolian* the sum of twenty-five hundred pounds for salvage of the *Java Queen*.
>
> —JULIUS VAN DYKE".

"How about the seven circles now, Mr. Atkins?" grinned the skipper, as the chief engineer came rather hurriedly up to the bridge. "He's accepted my offer of twenty-five hundred pounds."

"She'll never do it, Captain," said the chief gloomily. "I just came up to tell you that with the maneuvering of going ahead and astern she's developed a new kind of knock in the engines that I don't like the sound of. I can't say what's wrong unless we stop and make an examination, but I can tell you she'll never tow that fellow to Singapore."

"Godamighty," gasped the skipper, plucking the cap from his head and twisting it into a shapeless mass in his hands.

"You can't stop her now, just when I'm within an ace of getting back some of that six thousand pounds this highway robber of a Dutchman got out of me."

"It's the knock, Captain; it sounds bad."

"To hell with the knock!" bawled back Munro, throwing his cap on to the deck and jumping on it with both feet. "Forget it. Plug up your ears so you can't hear it. And we ain't going to tow him—he's going to tow us. Proper way with a rudderless ship. Get back below and keep the engines going until they collapse about your feet, and if we ain't fast to Van Dyke by that time I'll say my chance is gone, but not before, by cripes!"

He grabbed the megaphone as the chief backed down the ladder.

"Get your hawser ready on the poop and I'll shackle on to my starboard cable," he roared to Van Dyke.

"You're going to tow me," yelled back the Dutchman.

"Which just shows you're no sailorman," retorted Munro. "You'd swing around like a hay barge in a tideway, with no rudder, and be a menace to all the shipping in the China Sea. I make fast to your stern, you steam ahead, and I'll steer you. We'll help with our engines, of course. Now get busy, those rocks aren't so far off now."

On the forecastle focsle head Mr. Blake was already busy unshackling the cable from the anchor and, while Munro maneuvered the *Mongolian* close in under the stern of the other ship a heavy rope messenger was passed between the two vessels. Within an hour the eye of the big wire hawser was on the forecastle head and there remained only the task of connecting it to the cable and all would be secure. So far the engines had responded to every order, but the strain was beginning to tell on Captain Munro as he nervously paced the bridge watching the proceedings. And the last few minutes seemed almost an eternity.

"Get a move on with that shackle, Mr. Blake," he roared, unable to control himself any longer. "Don't go to sleep on the job."

"Hardly enough slack, sir," replied the mate. "Give her a touch ahead with the engines."

Impatiently the skipper rang down the order for slow ahead and listened for the familiar clankity-clank of the engines; but not a sound reached his ears. Just for a moment he waited; then, jerking the telegraph twice in quick succession, rang the order again. But still there was no response.

"Damnation!" he swore. "Am I going to lose him by a couple of feet?"

With a force that nearly jerked the telegraph out by the roots, he slammed down the order for full speed ahead. Then he turned an angry gaze toward the engine room, only to see Mr. Atkins racing madly along the deck.

"Can't move her," gasped the chief, his face flushed to the roots of his hair. "She's gone and—"

The skipper waited to hear no more, but grabbing the megaphone, he leveled it at the poop of the *Java Queen*.

"Pay out on that hawser," he fairly screamed. "Pay out, I say, you—you bunch of dead men. Stick it out lively, dodgast your hides."

His words seemed to crystallize on their passage through the air, and almost immediately the wire sagged down into the water. It was only a matter of inches now. Not daring to watch further, Munro leaned heavily on the rail and gazed down at the deck waiting for the worst. But Mr. Blake was prepared. With a quick heave on the messenger, another two feet of the hawser was dragged up on the forecastle Then nimbly slipping the shackle into place, the mate drove in the pin.

Captain Munro raised his head as he heard the cry that all was secure and, with a heavy sigh of relief, wiped off the large beads of perspiration that were streaming down his face. Then hailing the *Java Queen* he gave the order to steam ahead. Slowly the hawser tightened as it felt the strain; the chain cable grinded and scraped over the steel stern. With Munro himself at the wheel, the *Mongolian* sheered broad off the quarter of the *Java*

Queen and forced the rudderless ship around until her head pointed seaward. Then, after steaming out to a safe offing, Captain Munro pointed a course for Horsboro Light.

HIS FACE begrimed and his clothes sodden with perspiration, Mr. Atkins made his way dolefully up to the bridge to report to the captain.

"She's made a proper job of it this time, Captain," he said gloomily. "Snapped the valve spindle and bent the eccentric."

"Which in plainer language means what?" asked the skipper.

"That we're even more helpless than the *Java Queen*," answered the chief, looking up in a rather guilty way.

But to the engineer's complete surprise Captain Munro gave vent to a long and hearty laugh.

"Well, we should worry when we're well fast to a new boat with a good engine in her," he chuckled, giving the wheel a twist as the *Java Queen* sheered off her course. "She's yanking us along faster than we could go under our own power, and I wonder what that big Dutchman would give to know he's burning up his coal and paying twenty-five hundred pounds for the privilege of towing a disabled vessel into port? He would be pleased, I'm sure!"

"Gosh, but you were lucky to get tied up to him, sir," remarked the chief more cheerfully. "You just managed it in time."

"Seven times round in a circle and back out stern-first over the rim—that's what did it," laughed the skipper, giving the wheel another twist.

And two days later, the vessels zigzagged their way through the narrows by Horsboro Light and entered the eastern end of the Straits. Within a few more hours they eased up to a slow speed as they approached Singapore. Finally they came to a standstill in the outer harbor, and the anchors were dropped and hawsers cast off.

Placing the signed agreement in his pocket, Captain Munro lost no time in hailing a *sampan* and proceeding alongside the *Java Queen*, where Van Dyke stood looking over the rail with a scowl on his face as black as a tropical squall.

"Don't come on board my ship," he growled, as the *sampan* grated alongside. "Here is your check and be gone. I never want to see you again."

"And I can't say I'm particularly anxious to remain in your company," Munro shot back, standing up in the boat and examining the check in a deliberate and annoying manner. "Here's the agreement all signed and fixed up," he added, rolling the paper into a ball and throwing it up to the deck. "But, before I go, I want to thank you for towing us in. We got fast to you just in time; a matter of inches, that's all it was. But the check's big enough to put the *Mongolian* in good order and then leave a nice wad over for myself. Goodby, Captain Van Dyke, and thank you again for the tow," Munro laughed, as the *sampan* pushed clear of the side.

Van Dyke made no reply, but glared viciously at Munro as he pulled away; and knowing the *Mongolian*, he spat out an oath from between his teeth.

Back on board his own ship James Munro called the chief engineer and Mr. Blake to his cabin, where, with Van Dyke's check placed in the center of the table, they drank to the future success of the *Mongolian*.

"We'll go ashore in the morning and arrange about getting the engines fixed up in proper order, Mr. Atkins," remarked the skipper. "From now on she's not going to miss any charters."

"Not if we carry the same luck as we had when she got tied up to the *Java Queen*," the chief agreed, and smiled broadly.

"Seven times round the circle and back out stern-first over the rim. That's the stuff to give 'em. It's known at sea as squaring the circle," laughed the skipper, leaning back in his chair and draining his glass.

The NATURE *of the* BEAST

By CLYDE B. HOUGH

TUSKY was a wild boar. He lay in a mud puddle in a tropic jungle and grunted his appreciation. True, the mud was not very cool, but Tusky was lucky to have any mud at all to lie in and I suspect that he knew as much. It was the dry season in the tropics and mud was scarce.

On the edge of the mud puddle—she had been unchivalrously crowded out by Tusky—lay the sow; and thirteen young pigs rooted and nosed one another for a chance to suck their mother's twelve nearly dry dugs. Food was stringently scarce in that jungle at this particular time and the sow was hard put to it to root herself enough nourishment to generate milk for her offspring. But these things interested Tusky not at all. He was the father of those thirteen pigs and, had you come to that place and picked up one of the pigs in your hands and had it squealed and attracted Tusky's attention, he probably would have charged you, though not on account of his progeny, but because he would have resented your presence. Tusky lived for and was interested in just three things: to fight, to eat and to wallow by the hour in soft, cool mud.

Tusky, the boar, rose from the mud puddle reluctantly and grunted disgustedly. He was hungry and hunger was his second great passion, while wallowing in the mud was his third. Tusky trotted off through the jungle in search of food. He was not at any time a slick, gorgeous beast to exclaim over. But now the lean season had rendered him lean indeed. His warty skin hung in folds, resembling nothing so much as vast rolls of outrageously coarse emery cloth. His large, white tusks—the only clean things about him—curved up at either side of his long, powerful jaws, curved as fiercely as the Kaiser's mustache; and they were far more formidable.

Tusky trotted along with short, choppy,

little steps, after the manner of all pigs. His snout hung close to the ground, thrust forward as if it were a sort of pilot to guide him through the thick, scorched, half dead jungle growth.

The afternoon sun slanted mercilessly through gaps here and there between massive, royal palms, through tufted bamboo and drifted, like flakes of molten gold, down between the thick and twisted iron woods. And Tusky's snout, ever thrust forward, piloted him in and out among the giant branches of super-giant trees, branches that had reached downward and taken root in the earth. It was almost dark in these sylvan arcades where gray Spanish moss hung in long streamers like age worn, moth eaten portières.

On account of the semi-darkness, the ground here still retained some semblance of moisture and, therefore, also a few bugs and other insects. It was here then that Tusky employed his snout in the business for which it had really been created—rooting in the ground, unearthing bugs, worms and soft, young roots. These were the things that he lived upon, largely. That last is a paradox, for Tusky's living just now was anything but large.

Tusky rooted, and rooted hard. It is no snap, this plowing up the earth with the end of your nose. And to make the job doubly hard, that particular bit of ground was literally veined, traced, crossed and recrossed by hard, tough, old roots that simply could not be eaten, even by a wild boar. Tusky found but a scant few soft sprouts and still fewer bugs. So at the end of an hour he snorted the dirt out of his nostrils and slithered off through the jungle once again in search of more fertile pastures.

Presently Tusky came upon an enormous clump or cluster of bamboos. It was a regular family—nay, a whole community—of giant reeds that covered a space as large as a city block; another damp spot that harbored a few bugs and worms. But this place was also sorely infested by roots, obnoxious roots these, with great, hard thorns on them. Still Tusky had fed here before and knew about the bugs and worms, so he pulled off his coat, figuratively, and tied into the job. He rooted and grunted, puffed and snorted dirt out of his nostrils. He caught one small worm and a still smaller bug. Then he picked up a spoor that promised something bigger. Yes, Tusky could trail the earth people by their scent in the dirt.

The spoor led along a winding tunnel as large as a man's thumb. Tusky gave a deep grunt of satisfaction, plunged his snout into the dirt and pressed forward with the weight of his body, jerking his head up and down, snorting, throwing dirt right and left. Presently he reached the end of the tunnel and the bug. It was a big, black bug, big as a humming bird. Tusky swallowed it—the bug—whole, alive and kicking.

But what was that noise above? It was a ripping, crashing sound. Surely something was falling. Tusky's little eyes turned upward and he saw it coming—a forty foot bamboo that was seven inches in diameter. Too much dirt had been rooted away from the roots. Tusky moved, fast, away from that place. The bamboo swished and crashed to the ground and Tusky kept going.

So after awhile he came to the edge of a pond. It was a large pond; slimy, soggy logs were half submerged in the ink black water and enormous green leaves, large as blankets, floated on the surface. More damp ground here at the edge of the water and, therefore, a likely place to look for a meal. Tusky began rooting and soon found something edible. It must have been some delectable root, for he stopped to chew it with a swift, snapping movement. The next thing he unearthed was something alive. It was a sort of lizard that was enjoying a spell ashore, under a piece of molding bark.

Tusky had turned the piece of bark over and the amphibian had scurried toward the pond. Tusky followed with a rush. The water lizard reached the pond and disappeared without any noise to advertise its going. Then the dark water parted with a swift, hissing sound and a long, triangular head plunged ashore,

followed by several feet of heavily armored body—a crocodile! The crocodile's long jaws opened and shut like one flash of red lightning. But they shut on thin air, for in that same flash Tusky had pivoted on his hind legs and simply made tracks. He did not even take time to look back.

Yes, Tusky was a fighting fool, but not such a fool as to fight a crocodile. You should be told that some thousand of years ago, Tusky's ancestors got together and decided that it was not to the best interest of the swine family for boars to fight crocodiles. Thereafter, the ruling became an instinct and as such has ever since been handed down from progenitor to progeny.

As Tusky the boar headed away from the pond and the unfriendly crocodile he became aware of night spreading over the jungle. This ended the business of feeding for that day. Tusky trotted leisurely along, returning to his mud puddle.

THE HOT tropic sun had disappeared beyond the western ocean. Shadows were deepening swiftly among the trees. Some monkeys, hurrying home through the tree tops and the branches above, chattered to one another. A vampire bat roused from his daily sleep where he had been clinging all day in the fronds of a palm tree, his head hanging down. He spread his five feet of wings and flapped away, a huge blot against the darkening sky.

Tusky reached the mud puddle and snouted the sow out. The little pigs squealed, fretfully, and their mother grunted an angry protest, but Tusky was obdurate, relentless. Protests carried no weight with him. For fifteen minutes he lay on one side, soaking up cool mire. Then he rose lazily and eased down on the other side with a contented grunt.

A great white moon wheeled up the sky and etched out the trees and their limbs in black and silver. Tusky was disturbed by the nearby baying of some wild dogs. Tusky rose up, thin mud dripping from his belly and trickling down his legs. Rage possessed, he rushed fifty feet toward the sound and then stopped, stiff legged, his small eyes staring redly. He saw the dogs coming—a pack, five of them—as they passed through a broad patch of moonlight. He grunted a savage challenge, rushed forward another fifty feet and then stopped, stiff legged.

The sow marshaled her pigs and hurried them off in the other direction. She knew about those wild dogs, knew that they were after the young and tender meat that was her pigs.

Tusky waited and watched for the dogs to come on. They came, but they were mighty hungry, else they would not have come to face an issue with Tusky. As a matter of fact, they were hoping even now to avoid a fight. Their aim was to snatch a pig apiece and get away, clean. They were not ferocious, Himalayan wild dogs, these. They were the descendants of domestic canines that had left the homes of men but a few generations back.

But Tusky was not concerned with the desires, the intentions, or antecedents of these wild dogs. Neither was he considering the safety of his pigs. He simply wanted to fight. Beyond that he knew nothing, cared nothing. Fighting was his first great passion. Nature had created him so, and for a purpose.

The dogs were twenty paces away. Tusky "broke" with a rush. One fiercely curved tusk found entry between two dog ribs. An agonized yelp ceased, half uttered and a dog was flung aside to die. In the same instant another canine set his teeth among the tendons on the back of the boar's short neck.

Tusky was off to a grand start with all the signs pointing to a large evening ahead. Tusky shook himself with a violent effort, but the fiery teeth plowed deeper among the tendons on the back of his neck. He felt two other dogs tearing at his flanks. He lunged at the one in front of him, missed and was repaid by a vicious slash in the soft part of his throat—and that awful devil with the fangs of fire was still tearing at the back of his neck.

Tusky swung around and caught one

of the brutes at his flank across the small of its back. His long, strong jaws crunched and a spinal cord parted. That left three.

None of the combatants thought of stopping now. The lust of the kill was upon them all and the dogs, for the time being, were as brave as the boar.

At last four dogs were dead or helplessly dying, but those red hot fangs still tugged on the tendons at the back of Tusky's neck. He reared and wrenched in frenzied agony. He swung the dog's hinder parts around and got at its belly. He disemboweled it completely, and still the dog held on, its jaws locked in death. Tusky lunged forward, weakly, and something snapped in the back of his neck. He heard it distinctly. Then his lights went out and he dropped—into eternity.

But all the wild dogs in that vicinity were now wiped out and so thirteen little pigs were safe to grow up and beget other little pigs.

SONG AGAINST GOODBY

By HARRY KEMP

DON'T say goodby! We'll meet again somewhere,
Because good comrades always meet again . . .
Adventure always has a need for men:
We have dared dangerous stars, breathed burning air,
Bent sails together; we have fought ashore,
Shoulder to shoulder, in the lusty brawl
That left us better friends, in spite of all!
We'll meet again somewhere; don't say goodby.
Where storms, at first scarce noted by the eye,
Half sank us, we have somehow floundered through;
We'll meet again, while there's more work to do,
Ships still to sail, and other wars to fight
Where dreadful dawns assail the deafened night . . .
Go home, and rest a little, if you will;
The world's around the corner, waiting still.
Upon the sea, on land, or in the air,
As we are men, we'll meet again somewhere!

Conclusion of

The SPY NET

By ARED WHITE

CAPTAIN FOX ELTON, cipher expert and star operative of the American Military Intelligence, went to Switzerland instructed to penetrate the spy nest of the notorious German spymaster known as Count Kulm. This German, Von Kulm, lived in a great château overlooking Lake Geneva, and disarmed suspicions of the neutral Swiss by posing as a rich eccentric exiled by the war.

In his château he surrounded himself with a small army of fashionable assistants, who were as adept at drinking champagne with diplomats as they were at the sinister business of doing away with their own unfortunate comrades who knew too much.

Not only loyal Germans were Von Kulm's aides; he frequently duped innocent French and Americans into serving him. His women operatives, Mademoiselle Le Rivet and Señora Quarraza, had flirted many an Allied officer off his feet — particularly Señora Quarraza. Mademoiselle had taken pity on Captain Farnham, the American who had preceded Fox Elton into Switzerland; but she was helpless to prevent Farnham's return to Paris as an American officer handling communications from Von Kulm. Mademoiselle Le Rivet found herself liking Elton too; and such personal considerations are extremely dangerous in secret service.

Von Kulm had evidently decided that Elton's sojourn in Switzerland was of major importance, for his minions soon introduced Elton into the gay Continental atmosphere of the Von Kulm château. It was all Elton could do to keep in touch with the French operatives; with his own assistant, Sergeant Walters; with Colonel Rand of headquarters at Orly. Elton gladly agreed to sign and mail through the official, uncensored consulate post office the letters that Von Kulm dictated to him.

But the Germans did not know that in his wardrobe closet at the Beau Rivage Hotel Elton at night deciphered some of their secret ink messages. Thus he was prepared for almost everything they proposed.

However, their latest trick was almost unexpected. As he was about to leave the Von Kulm château after a particularly brilliant dinner party, Elton was called back. The Russian, Lomonosoff, wanted to see him. As Elton faced Lomonosoff in a private room, Lomonosoff attempted to shoot him—but the pistol misfired. As Elton grappled with the Russian some one entered the door and shot Lomonosoff dead. Suddenly the room was filled with witnesses, all of them evidently convinced that Elton had fired the shot.

The mysterious Von Kulm himself entered, and his ingratiating flunky, Monsieur Za.

However, Von Kulm's so-called secretary, a most impressive man known as Herr Sirwolten, did not appear. Von Kulm ordered Elton held in the château and left the room.

CHAPTER XIX

VON KULM'S TRIBUNAL

UPON the departure of Count Kulm from the room in which Vladimir Lomonosoff lay dead, Monsieur Za shook himself out of his servile pose and again asserted his authority. At Za's bark, two of the count's retainers, in the velvet coats and satin breeches of the château service, entered; two hulking men with the faces of Bavarians. At a terse guttural order from Za, one of these attendants placed himself at each side of Elton.

"You have heard the command of his Excellency," said Za through tight lips. "It is wise that you conduct yourself agreeably, monsieur."

Elton marched complacently between his two custodians. Neither of them was openly armed, and Elton knew that he could readily slip their heavy wits. The broad open windows of the second floor of the château offered a ready exit, but he knew that escape, tempting as it might appear at the moment, was a dubious adventure. No doubt, he reasoned, the care with which Von Kulm guarded himself against possible violence extended out-

side the château. And escape, even if he succeeded in getting completely out of Von Kulm's lake domain, meant threading his way under cover to Annemasse across the Swiss frontier; the abandonment of his mission. Tragic as was his present predicament, he quickly decided that but one course lay ahead of him. He must play the game through to the end.

They mounted a half stairs, after crossing forward through the château, traversed a network of hallways in a wing of the place, climbed a full flight to the topmost floor, and ended their jaunt in front of a door of ordinary thickness, apparently of walnut, with thin panels. The room into which he was taken was simply but comfortably furnished. The window panes were small squares of eight inches, puttied in ordinary stained wood.

A flimsy prison, Elton thought, as the two men left him alone. There was no clicking of locks or rasping of bolts as the door closed upon him. But when he tried the door, first gently, then with firmness, he found it securely locked. He also made a second discovery, verifying it with the point of his knife. The door was camouflaged steel, and the frames of the little windows also were of metal. A cell in everything except appearance. Count Kulm was well equipped to entertain those guests whose departure was not to his liking.

In the face of danger Elton had always found his mettle at its best, a crisis seeming only to steady his nerves, stimulate his faculties. Not even the spectacle of Lomonosoff dead at his feet had unstrung him. But now that the crisis was past and he was alone, the reactions struck him, a slight weakness at the knees, a feeling of faintness, a tremor in his hand.

He lighted a cigaret to test the steadiness of his hand. The flame shook fitfully and then steadied as he mastered himself. He had no doubt that German eyes watched his every move, intent on fathoming his every thought, and he was determined there should be nothing in his actions they could interpret as funk. He would hold himself inscrutable until Von Kulm finally showed his hand.

After a time he got ready for bed. Since there was no switch to be found in the room controlling the light cluster in the high ceiling, he guessed that the Germans did not intend to entrust him to darkness. If the lights were a safeguard against self-destruction or attempted escape, they served their purpose. But if they were meant to keep Elton under observation, he cheated the plan by the simple expedient of drawing the bed covers about his head.

It was one o'clock when he turned in. There was no knowing at what hour in the morning Von Kulm would send for him. Having been up late, it was likely that the count would sleep well into the forenoon. Or again, if there was anything in the count's appearance of an ancient file of the old German army, he might roll out at daybreak, soldier fashion, and want to proceed immediately with Elton's inquisition. In either event, Elton decided to make good use of the intervening time. There was the whole adventure to be gone over in detail; searched, analyzed, one incident compared with another, in an effort to divine the German purpose.

But as he struggled on, hour after hour, with the black enigma of the Russian's assassination, the resultant charge against him of Lomonosoff's murder, he found himself completely baffled. Whatever theory he adopted was replete with conflicting elements and illogical factors. Why, since they had him securely entangled, should they wish to spring a second trap? Was there some new and desperate use they had for him, a use beyond the mailing of their messages in invisible inks through the official American mail? If so, why did they not resort to any one of a hundred traps that did not involve wanton murder?

Had they broken his masquerade? He searched every wisp of evidence of this possibility, went over his every action since reaching Switzerland. He had taken but one chance, that of withholding Farnham's letter, the one that called for the St. Mihiel battle plans. But there had not

been time yet for them to know that the letter was missing from the mails at Paris. As for the message he gave to Sergeant Walters, that was in code, not cipher, and the German secret service would have only a litter of meaningless figures even if they intercepted the message.

Most puzzling of all was the desperate means used to spring this trap. The fact that Lomonosoff was the spy double might account for his presence in the château. But if the Russian awaited his hour of vengeance upon Von Kulm, why should he attempt to kill Elton? And why should some one in hiding shoot down the Russian?

Two vital circumstances removed any possible doubt that Lomonosoff's murder was intentional, that it was not the act of some unseen individual, the product of a private enmity. The first of these was the defective cartridge, which had failed to explode when the pistol was leveled at Elton's heart. The second was an incident of the pistol itself. The Russian had aimed a weapon fitted with a special front sight. The weapon that Za's henchman had examined and turned over for evidence had regulation sights. Elton had caught the deft substitution at the time, and discretely held his tongue, since it warned him that any words of his were unavailing.

By morning he was as far from a solution of the mystery as when he began. He had worked out every conceivable theory only to conclude in the end that he was helpless to fathom the German intricacies until there was a further development. But of one thing he had no doubts, that the German secret service planned to make some sinister use of their advantage.

ELTON lay in bed until roused for breakfast, which was brought in to him, an ample breakfast served by a butler who remained in the room, without speaking, until Elton had eaten. Welcome as he found breakfast, the fact that it was served to him was not a comforting omen. It told him that Von Kulm was not resorting to ordinary prison tricks, of bringing him up for inquisition on an empty stomach. Trifling as this incident might seem, it was eloquent of German confidence, of their belief in themselves in dealing with their prisoner.

It was shortly after breakfast that the summons came. Another disquieting detail. They did not keep him chafing through the morning. The same two liveried Bavarians, one on each side of him, escorted him through the château, down two flights of stairs and into a broad reception room. Monsieur Za was waiting in the room. He disappeared into an inner chamber and reappeared promptly.

"His Excellency is prepared to receive you, monsieur," said Za with feigned politeness. "Please to enter."

At a broad, long table sat Von Kulm, a graven image, in the manner of a regimental martinet receiving some refractory junior at headquarters. At the table with him sat the man who had followed close behind the count at the Red Room in Berne, Herr Sirwolten, the Von Kulm secretary. The others of the German chief's intimate retinue were seated about the room, at rear and on the sides of Von Kulm.

After a long silence in which Von Kulm merely sat looking at Elton in bilious bad temper, the count turned to Herr Sirwolten.

"My representative will please deal with the American," Von Kulm announced, and leaned back, folded his arms and lapsed into his stolid silence.

"Captain Elton," said Herr Sirwolten, "it will simplify matters a great deal if we proceed with the utmost frankness. No matter what subterfuges may be thought necessary in the ordinary practises of espionage and counter-espionage activity, let us forget those conceits for the time being."

The man spoke in an easy, matter-of-fact, almost friendly voice. But Elton found himself engrossed, not with his introductory words, but by the remarkable transformation in the man since that night he had seen him dining at the Red

Room of the Bellevue Palace. Herr Sirwolten's large gray eyes were not now the lenses of field glasses, a comparison Elton had made at his first sight of the man. They glowed with an inscrutable vitality that might have been amusement, understanding, arrogance, intimidation, or all of these. Their set, far apart under a forehead that was even broader and more dominant than Elton first thought, was that of a man of the highest order of intelligence. Elton felt the mettle of the man as he sat looking back at him, a man to be reckoned with.

"Proceed, monsieur," Elton replied simply.

"I wish, to begin with, to present certain facts," Herr Sirwolten proceeded. "First of all, here is an empty cartridge. It was picked up in the room where the Russian, Vladimir Lomonosoff, was killed during the course of a quarrel with you, a quarrel overheard by many persons in the château, including Swiss officers and several neutral attachés. The cartridge fits the pistol you were holding at the time the room was entered. The pistol had just been fired. These facts, Captain Elton, would convince any reasonable court of your guilt, is that not so?"

"Except," said Elton stiffly, "these are not facts you have just stated, Herr Sirwolten."

Sirwolten's eyes sparkled definite amusement.

"Even so," he affirmed easily. "But you must not confuse fact with sentiment. Facts are what appear to be, what can be proven—not what actually is, my dear Captain. Since that is incontrovertible, will you not admit the case against you is rather complete and conclusive?"

"You overlook any possible motive, Herr Sirwolten. The courts, any court, would consider that I had never known the Russian, that he sent for me as I was leaving the château where I was a guest, that we had no reason to quarrel."

"Motives are easily supplied." Herr Sirwolten smiled. "An especially powerful motive appears to have escaped your eyes, my Captain, unless you merely equivocate now. But there is a choice of motives—and we will come to that later."

Elton shifted involuntarily, a slight rift in his composure induced by the other's relentless eyes. He caught himself instantly and smiled. Sirwolten smiled back his understanding of Elton's slight nervousness.

"In any event," Elton rejoined calmly, "I appear to be convicted here, no matter what I say."

"Precisely, Captain." Herr Sirwolten's smile was insinuating. "And you will agree that there is no tribunal that can claim a wider authority in passing judgment against you than that before which you now sit."

"You do not make yourself clear, Herr Sirwolten."

"Please do not keep up a senseless pretense, Captain. You may have thought us very stupid, and with very good reasons, in the past. But surely you have revised that view by now."

"Please be more explicit."

"Of course. If you wish me to put into words what is clearly in our minds, I will oblige. We here in this chamber are of the Imperial German secret service, at the head of international operations in Switzerland. In the course of our operations we laid a snare for you, and you fell into it. You have been useful to us in mailing certain communications, despite any mental reservations you may have held. And now, Captain Elton, will you declare your purpose in Switzerland with equal frankness to that in which I have spoken?"

"An officer of Engineers, attached to the Signal Corps, sent into Switzerland on an honorable mission," replied Elton promptly.

"That mission being—"

"The purchase of certain Swiss manufactured instruments, Herr Sirwolten."

Sirwolten's jaw snapped shut.

"Bah," he sneered. "Since you feel you must equivocate, let me put the words in your mouth. You are Captain Fox Elton, American Military Intelligence Service, in Switzerland to match your wits against those of his Excellency, the Count Kulm!"

"Thank you for the information," Elton parried coolly, a cynical smile on his lips as he faced the fact that he was unmasked. "I suppose it is useless for me to deny anything you may care to charge against me."

"Senseless, rather than useless," snapped Sirwolten. His words became more incisive. "But from now on let us not play with words. His Excellency has other claims upon his time, so we must conclude this discourse as promptly as possible."

"Very well; proceed."

"You came here to kill his Excellency—"

"Assassination is not an American method," Elton interrupted.

"Another mere play on words, Captain Elton. If you had succeeded in getting his Excellency into the hands of one of your Allied courts, the result would have been quite the same."

"At least," Elton responded satirically, "he would not have to face trial on a concocted murder charge."

"A mere matter of expediency, my dear Captain. The only reason we have not dealt with you as a spy, in our own good way, is that your life is too valuable to us, if I have not underestimated your intelligence. That being the case, we have a choice to offer you now."

"An honorable choice, Herr Sirwolten?"

"A sensible one at least, my Captain. Your decision, of course, depends upon whether you are ruled by your intelligence or by foolish sentiment."

"You said we were not to waste words," Elton reminded him.

"You have your choice of doing as we wish you to do, or of being surrendered to the Swiss courts. Our wishes will require the forwarding as your own of certain reports to your Military Intelligence, of mailing letters as you have been doing in the past, and effecting certain contacts with the French secret service in Geneva."

"All of this, Herr Sirwolten," Elton replied, "is based on your mere assumption that I am of the American Secret Service. Might it not be that you are taking a great deal for granted?"

"Let me set you at ease on that score, Captain. We confront you with no mere assumption. When I first saw you dining alone at the Red Room of the Bellevue Palace at Berne, your face suggested grave possibilities. Your ride with the French military attaché, the reports of your actions almost convinced me that my intuitions were at fault. It was not until the French betrayed you, Captain Elton, that we saw how completely you had fooled us. Your midnight plunge from the French motorboat into Lake Geneva escaped our agents, and your conferences with Monsieur Rougemont."

"The French, eh?"

Elton said this reflectively the while his mind searched the German's charge. How, indeed, had Von Kulm's henchman learned of his plunge, if not through the French? How else could they have penetrated his masquerade after he had fooled them completely?

"The French would have no cause to tell you that," he replied presently, in a voice that had lost its assurance.

"So you may surmise, Captain Elton," said Sirwolten. "But, except for their good offices, you might have fooled us indefinitely, even as the Russian might have accomplished his devilish mission. The French you see, are very obliging. So now, Captain Elton—your decision."

"You expect me to enter your service?"

Von Kulm's secretary gave a hollow laugh.

"We expect nothing so absurd as that," he replied. "The price of your life is that you do as you are told. As a mere matter of form, we will administer our oath to you, but we realize perfectly that you will accept that with mental reservations."

"You do not object then to—to my reservations?"

"Of course not. If it will amuse you to think you can escape the consequences of your acts now that we know you for what you are, you are most welcome to your reservations. We feel entirely able to take care of our interests, my dear Captain Elton."

Elton sat for several moments gazing

into the cool, level eyes of Herr Sirwolten.

"Very well," he replied. "I accept."

Sirwolten turned at once to Von Kulm and addressed him with deference.

"Was there anything your Excellency wished further?" he inquired.

Von Kulm started, blinking in the way of a man who has been caught napping.

"No, nothing," he said in a thin voice. "Nothing at all," he added in a louder voice, in which there was a rather forced assertion of authority.

Sirwolten rose, the others with him in unison.

"As soon as certain formalities have been disposed of by Monsieur Za," he charged Elton, "you are free to return to Geneva and go about without restriction. But please to remember conceit is a dangerous weakness—and yours might easily prove fatal to you."

CHAPTER XX

LONG EARS

MONSIEUR ZA was bubbling over with an arrogant sort of self-satisfaction as he was left in charge of Elton. He snapped his fingers impatiently at one of the château attendants, who interpreted the unspoken order by bringing a sheet of colored linen paper, a pen contained in a glass of water and a small lancet.

"Monsieur will please to remove his tunic," Za instructed. "A prick of the knife, a dip of the pen and monsieur will sign the Imperial oath of allegiance with his own red ink."

Elton extended his arm nonchalantly.

"An absurdity," he said, "but I suppose I must put up with it."

"A valuable document when it is signed, monsieur," said Za. He gave the lancet a quick thrust and handed Elton the pen. "Sign please before the ink congeals."

"With reservations," said Elton as he dashed his name upon the document and returned it to Za. "An oath under duress."

"As I said a moment ago," replied Za, handing the accomplished oath to the flunky for disposition, "a valuable document when signed. At least it gives us the power of life and death over you."

"Well, what next?"

"The matter of a report, monsieur. A report which we wish made to the chief of your secret service in France."

Za snapped his fingers again. The servant brought a typewritten sheet and handed it to him. After reading it through, Za passed it to Elton.

"Sign, monsieur," he commanded. "When that is done we will proceed to Geneva, where you may place your report in the consulate mail."

"You must have felt quite sure of yourselves, Za, to have this prepared in advance."

"When his Excellency sets his mind to a thing, it never fails," boasted Za. "Monsieur is not the first American officer to take our oath, and will not be the last if more of your kind dare to set foot in Switzerland."

If Elton expected to sign a report whose very extravagance and absurdity would betray it to Colonel Rand when the document reached headquarters, he was startled by the uncanny understanding in which the thing had been prepared. He saw that, brief as it was, it served several purposes. Not only would it reassure Colonel Rand, but it also paved the way for Elton to stay in Switzerland for an indefinite period. It read:

> Dear Colonel: Things progress well. I have secured a number of excellent leads, but find we were mistaken about that Von Kulm suspicion. The German secret service doesn't amount to as much as reported over here in Switzerland, thanks to Swiss neutrality precautions. I am working with the Swiss and French to good purpose, and find myself able to promise you excellent results, as well as a complete report, within thirty days. Please pay no attention to the mails for the next few weeks. It would be found out if you intercept letters and spoil all our plans over here.
>
> Very respectfully yours,
> —FOX ELTON, Captain, Engr. U. S. Army

Even while he was signing his name to the bogus report Elton was busy with his

plans of circumventing its purposes. If Colonel Rand should drop the scrutiny of the official mails, Elton knew that the consequences might prove serious. His manner was perfunctory as he returned the report to Za, who sealed it and put it in his pocket.

"Before we disembark at Geneva, I shall return the letter to you for posting, monsieur. But please to dismiss any thought you may have of cheating the mailbag at your consulate. Observant eyes shall accompany you hereafter, when you go to the new German-American post office."

The launch in which Elton had come to the château was waiting for them, from which Elton deduced that the craft was really held at the disposal of Za. As they neared Geneva, Za gave Elton his further instructions.

"By Herr Sirwolten's instructions, given in the name of Count Kulm, you are to contact the French secret service," said Za. "It was left to me to carry out the further details." His voice became peremptory. "I direct that you proceed, as soon as it is nightfall, to the Café du Nord."

"Is that an order—or a request, Za?" Elton baited the pompous little intermediary mischievously.

"An order, monsieur!" said Za. He laughed malevolently. "Ha! Matters have changed since monsieur dared to insult me in public at the dining room of the Beau Rivage."

"So that's what has been eating at you?" laughed Elton. "I knew that your feeling against me was something more than merely official hatred, but really hadn't guessed your caliber that small."

"Monsieur will obey my orders!" Za retaliated petulantly.

"On the other hand, if you make yourself obnoxious, I shall let Herr Sirwolten know that I'll have nothing further to do with you," Elton threatened, smiling inwardly. "Put your words in the form of requests."

"A request, then," agreed Za grudgingly. "You will seek out the French tonight at the Du Nord?"

"For what purpose—what is it I'm expected to do?"

"As you please, monsieur." Za was evidently grateful to have their conversation returned to a basis of outward politeness. "It does not matter."

"But I don't understand what I'm expected to learn," Elton persisted, genuinely puzzled by the other's terse reply.

"It does not matter," Za repeated. "You meet with the French secret agent at the Café du Nord, you confer with him, you say what you wish. *Voilà!* That is all."

"Then there's nothing special I'm to bring up."

"But no, monsieur. Nothing."

WHEN they landed at the Quai du Mont Blanc Za took the letter from his pocket and handed it to Elton.

"In your hand you will carry it to the consulate, monsieur," he instructed. "I am responsible that it do not fail."

"I suppose you even want to go into the consulate with me and see it censored, stamped and dropped in the courier pouch?"

"Ah, but the monsieur shall have the more pleasant company," smiled Za. "As the attaché of Austria, monsieur, I might perhaps be recognized. Besides, I return on the instant to the château for matters of greater importance."

Elton was crossing the quay when the more pleasant company to which Za had referred appeared in his course in the person of Mademoiselle Le Rivet. Mademoiselle was alone and afoot today, and she threw off her usual reserve to greet him with a warm friendliness that he saw was simulated for the benefit of possible curious eyes.

"You are to see a great deal of me, monsieur," she said with forced airiness. "I am waiting to go with you now to your consulate while you post a certain letter."

"This is an honor," said Elton ironic-

ally. "The German secret service not only favors me with membership—membership with reservations—but assigns its most clever temptress to go about with me and see that I do not have too many reservations."

"Cleverness is not necessary in tempting some men," Mademoiselle Le Rivet retorted.

"You pink me in my vulnerable spot," Elton said dryly. "You refer to the beautiful countess, of course."

"To Señora Quarazza," said mademoiselle. Her voice became chilly. "When men are moved from the course of their duty by señora—I feel no pity for them."

"Sort of serves them right, as it were?"

"I mean—they are fair prey."

"I see. An interesting code. But suppose señora and the countess should fail, and the intended victim shows a weakness for Mademoiselle Le Rivet?"

"That, monsieur, would be impossible," she replied indignantly. "That is no part of my duty."

"I humbly beg your pardon, mademoiselle," said Elton with mock politeness. "I see that I have done you a grave injustice. You merely angle for the victims, using other women for the bait, having them do the things you would not stoop to do in order to wreck men's lives and destroy their honor. A noble distinction indeed."

Mademoiselle Le Rivet flushed scarlet. She walked along beside him with her eyes set straight to the front, making no attempt at reply. Presently the color faded and her face became ashen. Elton saw that he had struck a vital blow.

"I'm sorry if I wounded you," he relented. "For me this has been a bitter day, but I'll try to make the most of it hereafter, and not be disagreeable."

"My only thought has been to do my duty—as a soldier would do it," she replied in a strained voice, without looking at him.

She entered the consulate with him while he claimed exemption from censorship for his official report and placed it in the mails. As soon as they had left the consulate Mademoiselle Le Rivet stopped in front of a convenient shop and extended her hand.

"We must keep up appearances," she smiled. "There is no telling when Swiss or French eyes may be watching us. But you will see that I am ridding you of my presence as quickly as possible."

Without waiting for him to reply, she turned into the shop. Elton, glad to be alone while he made an estimate of the situation now confronting him, returned by a circuitous route to the Beau Rivage.

Elton made no effort to minimize the tragic seriousness of his plight. He faced the cold facts without equivocation. He was in effect a prisoner of the German secret service, as much a prisoner as if he had been held in that barred room of the count's château on Lake Geneva. They would watch his every move and action, keep him hedged in with a squad of alert leg operatives. He reasoned that there had been considerable more than empty formality in the tapping of his veins for the absurd secret service oath.

Having subscribed to the obligation, even with open reservations, he knew that, in German eyes, he was bound by its laws. An attempt at escape would give his shadows the right to shoot him down without qualms—and if there should be embarrassment over such a tragedy, the legations could be shown *sub rosa* that Elton was that most despised of creatures, the double spy.

But there was in Von Kulm's terms one complication that was very much to Elton's liking. The instruction to contact the French at the Café du Nord was the solution of a problem that had been freting him. It left him free to meet with Captain Rougemont, to contact Sergeant Walters. He would know that he was meeting them under German eyes and could govern himself accordingly. A game of wits in which he would claim the advantage.

The vagueness of Za's instructions on that point alone worried him. He had supposed he was to be the German medium for tapping the French secrets. If so, what

was the meaning of Monsieur Za's indifferent instructions? Nothing more was required of him, seemingly, than that he should contact the French and discuss what he pleased. Such instructions were so contrary to German thoroughness that they nettled him. Did it mean that they merely wished to check his actions through the spy double, of whose existence in the French secret service Herr Sirwolten had spoken? But if that was the case, why had they let him know that they had their agent planted with the French? Since there was no logical explanation of this enigma, he put it aside for future reckoning.

On reaching his room at the Beau Rivage, he became a man with no other evident purpose than to shave, bathe and change his clothes. After a fruitless search for clean linen, he entered the clothes closet rummaged in his trunk and emerged in a minute with the missing garment. A second and third time he found it necessary to invade the closet for missing articles of wear. During those brief visits, he had prepared a terse message for dispatch to Colonel Rand.

It was a message of three symbols—87-15-5—inscribed in invisible ink on a segment of cigaret paper an inch long and a quarter of an inch across. He wadded it carefully into the tip of a Swiss cigar. When the stub of that cigar was delivered to Rand, those figures would take him to the fifth word of the fifteenth line of page eighty-seven of the Service Testament. The word was "corrupt", code word for the significant phrase, "Ignore all my reports until further notice."

Elton crossed the Rhone at the first bridge shortly before eight o'clock and entered the Café du Nord. The night crowds already were out in force and tables were scarce. Instead of bribing one of the head waiters, he meandered about the place looking for a seat, only to be told each time he attempted to sit down that the table was reserved. Finally, in evident embarrassemnt, he asked permission to sit at a small table occupied by a single diner, who glowered at him and nodded a grudging acquiescence.

WHILE waiting for his wine to be brought, Elton's eyes roved the café. He had seen Rougemont at entering the crowded room, but had purposely given him a wide berth. When his wine was brought he offered a glass to the man at whose table he intruded, but the offer was refused with a curt shake of the head. Presently he lighted a cigar, and as an afterthought extended one to the man across the table.

"An excellent weed, I can assure you, monsieur," he said with a certain vibrant intensity in his voice.

"Yes, sir," muttered Walters, accepting the cigar without enthusiasm, biting the end and lighting it.

No other words passed between them, Walters settling back into his unsociable silence, Elton searching the room again until his eyes fell upon Rougemont's table With an abrupt apology for his intrusion, he crossed the room to join the Frenchman.

Rougemont brightened at sight of Elton, but Elton saw at a glance that the Frenchman was without his previous *sang froid*. He omitted the customary French amenities and launched into the trouble that filled his mind.

"Something, monsieur, has gone very much wrong, I fear," he complained. "From Vladimir Lomonosoff we have had no word."

"You were expecting him here?" Elton inquired innocently.

"But no, monsieur," replied Rougemont. "But from him we were expecting great things, an event fixed for yesterday —and yet we have reason to know that he has failed us."

"He has failed to kill Von Kulm, you mean?"

"Today, the Count Kulm has been seen alive about his château grounds," replied Rougemont disconsolately.

"Are you quite sure, monsieur," Elton insinuated, "that your Russian spy double was wholly to be trusted?"

"*Certainment!*" Rougemont exclaimed sharply. "Lomonosoff's purpose was not to be questioned."

"May I ask you this question, monsieur?" Elton inquired abstractly. "Did the Russian know of my identity, or was my mission or presence ever discussed in his presence?"

"Never, monsieur. Not even the hint of your existence in Geneva."

"You are quite certain of that?"

"Positive, monsieur; but why do you ask the question?"

"Merely an idle curiosity. But who besides you knew of my affairs, of my swim in the lake?"

"No one excepting Jacques, the boatman."

"You made no report of the matter to Lareaux."

"I thought it would be of no interest to Lareaux, monsieur."

"You are sure of Jacques?"

"Five wounds in the service of France are on the body of Jacques, monsieur. My own brother I would not trust more. The life of Jacques it is nothing to him if he can but serve France—as you may learn soon to your great satisfaction, monsieur."

Elton leaned back and puffed thoughtfully at his cigar. If Rougemont were not deceived, then who could have betrayed him to the German secret service? Of Rougemont he had no suspicion. That Rougemont was a spy double he accepted as impossible. A loyal Frenchman wholly incapable of disloyalty to France. Nor did he challenge the Frenchman's alertness and judgment. Lareaux was eliminated, or a leak from the French legation at Berne, by the German knowledge of that plunge in the lake from the gunwale of the *Filisur*.

His eyes sought those at the tables nearby. There were German agents in the Café du Nord. He knew his own shadows were not far removed, but as he estimated the danger of being overheard from adjoining tables, he saw that was remote. Rougemont's table was set at the edge of a dancing pavilion; the tables about it did not crowd. But the answer to the puzzle swept suddenly before his mind. He dropped his eyes casually as if he had not seen.

"You have new plans, then, monsieur?" he addressed Rougemont.

The Frenchman leaned closer and lowered his voice.

"A desperate plan, but one that we will use if—"

"You mean the plan you told me of," Elton broke in firmly. "The plan to get the Swiss secret service on Von Kulm's trail and smoke him out under the Swiss neutrality laws?"

Rougemont eyed Elton in bewilderment.

"I do not understand—" he began, then cut off his sentence in sudden obedience to the look of warning in Elton's eyes. "I do not understand," he covered quickly, "how it is Von Kulm has escaped the Swiss for so long. But you may be certain, monsieur, if Lomonosoff has failed, we will fall back upon the Swiss. But—but do you wish to have a turn in the open air of the quai, Monsieur?"

"An excellent idea," said Elton.

They paid their bill, went outside and sauntered down the waterfront to the broad open space of the Place du Rhone.

"I must ask you an important question, monsieur," said Elton. "At any time did you discuss with any one at the Du Nord my plunge into the lake?"

"Only with Jacques," said Rougemont after a moment's thought. "That night you leaped into the water, we came later to the café for a bottle of wine and wondered if you had made the shore. But why do you ask?"

"That explains to me many things," said Elton. "We have been neatly tricked, monsieur," he said grimly. "But we will be able to return the compliment with interest, I suspect."

"Your words, monsieur, I do not understand."

"From Berne, Monsieur Rougemont, the German secret service has sent its most interesting operative. Notwithstanding his masquerade of false hair and stained lenses, I identified him instantly by the

shape of his peculiarly square head—a dumb mute who reads your words as you speak, by the movement of the lips. His presence here explains to me several things that have puzzled me."

CHAPTER XXI

ORDERS FROM HEADQUARTERS

IN THE morning the inevitable Monsieur Za was on hand before Elton finished breakfast. He had many letters to be written today, he explained, and must have them ready for typing without delay. Za was in fine fettle, alternately rubbing his chubby hands and grooming his tiny mustache as in self-felicitation while his eyes glowed an arrogant superiority.

"To the present moment, my Captain," he condescended, as Elton wrote, "you have responded to our requirements of you in the most excellent manner."

"What are you talking about?" Elton queried absently, without looking up from his task.

"It is as I convince his Excellency," Za gloated. "The Americans are most easy to handle and have an even greater dumbness than the Bavarians."

"That doesn't answer my question!" snapped Elton.

"You have speak with the French last night?" Za countered, more polite of voice. "And what is it the Captain learn?"

Elton resumed his writing and replied in a heavy voice, as if the subject was a distasteful one.

"Well, since you ask, the French are chiefly wrought up over the disappearance of the Russian, Vladimir Lomonosoff."

"They have given up hope of his return?"

"Almost, I gathered."

"Ah, but the Captain could have told them much on that subject, yes?"

"Let's not mention that again, Za, if I'm to hold my temper!"

"Pardon. But please to tell me, what mischief is it the French plan now in Geneva, since they think their spy double has failed them?"

Elton looked up to see that Za waited eagerly for the answer.

"I will tell you this much, Za. Warn Count Kulm to be on his guard against the Swiss secret service. I have reason to think the French may try to force Swiss neutrality into action."

The Austrian's eyes danced.

"Excellent, my Captain," he exclaimed, plucking excitedly at the straw colored stubble of his upper lip. "Your report is most excellent. It confirm what I have tell to his Excellency, that the American is much like the Bavarian when you have him tight in the trap from which he can not squeeze—so easy to handle, so obliging!"

Elton decided to ignore the slur, and changed the subject.

"There are a great many letters today, Za," he complained. "Is there not danger of causing suspicion at the American consulate?"

"You will please address me as Monsieur Za," the agent reminded Elton of his manners.

"Certainly," Elton assented, "but why not Herr Za, instead of the French term?"

"Herr Za is much more to my liking, in fact." Za shrugged disparagingly. "But in Geneva, it is the language of the French we must use, and their abominable customs, so I must insist upon Monsieur Za."

"All right, Monsieur Za; but I asked you a question."

"The American consulate mail—that is the Captain's risk," Za sneered. "But there is small risk of American suspicions, is it not so?"

Again Elton ignored the thrust, since it did not suit his purpose to dispute any growing thought in Za's mind that Americans are a stupid lot. He centered his attention back upon the letters, memorizing the names and addresses that had not appeared in previous letters. Since names were multiplying, he began indexing them in his memory, giving each name a number and associating it with some familiar object, the better to fix it in his mind

against the hour when he would require the information.

By ten o'clock he had dashed off thirty brief letters. Two hours later Za was back with the typewritten copies for Elton's signature. When the letters were ready for the American mail pouch Za trailed Elton out into the Rue du Mont Blanc where Mademoiselle Le Rivet was in waiting to escort the hostage to the consulate. Elton saw that the woman had steeled herself to her duty, that there was a touch of defiance in her eyes today.

"Out of the keeping of one jailer into the clutches of another," he greeted her cheerfully. "Well, since I must be held on the Kaiser's leash, mademoiselle, I vastly prefer that it be held by your hands."

"Thank you, monsieur," she replied stoutly, "but if you are expecting to be rid of me quickly today, you are going to be disappointed. My instructions are to spend the afternoon in your company—luncheon at the Kursaal, a ride by horse-cab later through the city."

"To whom am I indebted for this great honor?" he asked less agreeably.

"The instructions of Count Kulm."

"Ah, I see. Some new trap, eh?"

"A new trap would hardly be necessary, would you think, monsieur?" she taunted.

"It would really seem so, but when one who has felt the bite of two traps sees the —the—"

Elton hesitated. Needless offense did not fit in with his plan of dealing with Mademoiselle Le Rivet.

"Sees the trapper," she supplied the words with spirit. "But please remember, monsieur, that I have no regret on your account. You were fair prey—and I waste no sympathy upon the victims of Señora Quarazza!"

As they walked together toward the consulate Elton puzzled upon this comment. It was the second time she had made such a reference to the Spanish adventuress. Before entering the consulate Elton took his penknife from the pocket of his trousers, covertly opened the blade and transferred it to the left pocket of his coat, the pocket farthest away from mademoiselle as he walked at her left. The letters were passed without question at the consulate, and three letters from France, all under the official censorship seal, were handed to him in return by the consul. He placed them casually in his coat as he introduced Mademoiselle Le Rivet to the American consul, intent on diverting her attention from the letters. But she was not to be cheated.

"You received three letters, monsieur," she reminded him, when they were again out in the street. "You understand, of course, that I am to receive them from you unopened."

"You mean, Mademoiselle Le Rivet, that I am not permitted to read my own letters?"

"When I have first opened them and verified their contents, monsieur, then you may read."

"You are very thorough, mademoiselle," he said dryly.

"My instructions," she replied.

Elton's left hand had been busy with the penknife during this exchange. He had slit open the three envelopes, removed the inner envelopes, and arranged them for delivery to the German agent. If Colonel Rand had overlooked no detail of seal and censor stamp on those inner letters he knew they would pass the closest inspection, while the secret letters meant for him would remain hidden in his pocket.

"Very well," he acceded, "here are your letters."

"But no—not here!" she gasped. "We must use discretion, monsieur. You must pass them to me later when we are alone."

"So that is the purpose of luncheon at the Kursaal."

"No, monsieur. It is because of what you call our thoroughness—in the interest of plausibility. If I left you immediately on coming out of your consulate each day, it might attract suspicious eyes. Herr Sirwolten it is who says we must be seen much together, in order to rob suspicion. But while we are riding this afternoon, you may give me the letters."

"German thoroughness overlooks no detail, does it, mademoiselle?"

"Herr Sirwolten is a man of great detail who can be counted upon to overlook nothing, monsieur."

"But if we are to go about together a great deal—" he smiled—"might that not bring a different sort of suspicion upon us—that we are too much interested in each other?"

"That is exactly what Herr Sirwolten wishes for, monsieur. One suspicion disarms the other, is it not so?"

"But," Elton persisted whimsically, "has he no fear that some foundation for a suspicion might actually grow up?"

"Not in the slightest, monsieur," she replied disdainfully.

"Why?"

"Because it is too absurd."

"I've often heard it argued against women agents that there is always the danger they will become too sympathetic with their victims, Mademoiselle Le Rivet."

"You but quote Count Kulm's own theory, monsieur, which is the very reason the women agents work only through me, as I require them."

Elton laughed.

"I see. You are proof against mere men, eh?"

"That is very simple, monsieur," she replied looking him fairly in the eyes. "With the sort of men I must deal with in my duty—the kind that have lost their heads to Señora Quarazza, I could find no sympathy. A country that is destined to rule the world must make use of the weaknesses of its enemies."

Elton walked beside her in silence. She had used the very phrase that was contained in Von Kulm's cipher instructions to Von Strindheim at Paris. The German secret service slogan for the offensive it was preparing to carry forth. So that was how mademoiselle squared her conscience with her duty. Trapping weaklings. But he was not the less puzzled by her continued reference to Señora Quarazza, her reiterated taunts that he had fallen a ready and willing victim to the wiles of the Spanish mercenary.

"Why, mademoiselle," he asked her presently, "are you always throwing that Spanish woman in my face?"

"Did not monsieur completely lose his head over such a woman?" she demanded.

"In the line of my duty, perhaps," he said soberly, "when I was trying to worm my way into the Count von Kulm's stronghold. But will you believe me now when I say that the woman was really repulsive to me?"

Mademoiselle Le Rivet laughed aloud, then turned to Elton with level eyes.

"Please, monsieur; do not think you can impose upon me with deceit. I have not been left in darkness as to what happened at the château. No man has been a more anxious or willing victim of the señora!"

"You are very much mistaken on that score, mademoiselle. I repeat that the woman was little short of obnoxious to me."

"So obnoxious, monsieur," she said with a cold sneer, "that you fought a duel for her favor—a duel with a neutral diplomatic agent who was as dizzy as you. Ha, you thought I didn't know that!"

"Fought a duel?" Elton echoed.

"Please, we are at the Kursaal, monsieur, and must speak of other things. Besides, I do not wish to hear anything further on the subject of your unhappy affairs, which are your own doings."

DURING luncheon Mademoiselle Le Rivet adroitly parried Elton's every effort to lead her into serious conversation. She persisted in an outward show of friendly vivacity, for the benefit of inquiring eyes. To her the luncheon was strictly in line of duty, a detail of the day's work. She had made it plain to Elton that she was without the slightest sympathy for him in his extremity. Her every action emphasized that thought. He was fair prey, a weakling, an enemy agent whose weakness had betrayed him, who was entitled not even to pity.

But Elton confirmed, too, his first impression that mademoiselle was not the ordinary secret agent. Her deep blue eyes, as she regarded him, were calm and level. He had seen women operatives with that look, women who had grown colder and more relentless than the most war hardened men operatives. Yet with Mademoiselle Le Rivet, he guessed that she maintained her pose with conscious effort, that under the surface there was sharp conflict between a sensitive, cultivated nature, a cultivated conscience, and the grim requirements of war service. Even the stanchest men in the fighting ranks sometimes know that conflict, and go through with it all by reminding themselves constantly that it is their duty to kill; the thing that is expected of them by their country. In her every action, in the manner of her dress, her conversation, Mademoiselle Le Rivet was a woman, Elton thought, used to gentle surroundings, one who would be available to the secret service only when war had turned the heads of every one.

Her beauty, had she not refused to use it as a weapon, would have been a hundred times more effective than that of the other women used to enmesh Elton. The fact that she did refuse to use personal charm in her operations added convincing substance to his theory that she was not the ordinary spy. And the fact that they gave her other women, such as the Spanish adventuress, told him that the crafty Von Kulm was unable to bend her to his will completely, since that sly rascal must have discerned the power of the weapon which she refused to use. An indication that her intelligence was valuable enough in itself to Von Kulm. Or that she was entrenched in position at home which Von Kulm was forced to remember.

As they rose to leave the Kursaal Elton made a deft proposal. He wished an opportunity to press his inquisition, and knew that the ears of a horsecab driver would leave him at a sorry disadvantage.

"Why not a row on Lake Geneva?" he suggested. "Unless, of course, your orders are so very specific that we must jolt about the cobblestones in an old rattletrap."

"A turn on the lake will do well enough," she replied. "My instructions are merely to be seen about with you."

They strolled to the quay and embarked.

"May I put to you a fair question, mademoiselle?" he asked, when they were well out from the quay.

"I would advise, monsieur," she replied with an easy smile, "that you remember I spent my months in the secret service school at Berlin before coming to Switzerland. Monsieur will waste his time trying to learn from me things he is not expected to know."

"But your references to the Spanish woman, your statement that there had been a duel over her—I did not understand what you meant," he persisted.

"Now that we are alone," she ignored his plea, "will you please let me have the letters?"

Elton took the three letters from his pocket and handed them to her gloomily. She examined the censor stamp, the seal, and tore them open one at a time. As she read them her eyes filled with horror.

"So?" she exclaimed, drawing the single word into an accusing sneer.

She handed the letters to Elton with an outraged toss of her hand. He read the first of them with quickening pulse:

> Secret: Ascertain if German secret service has gained any inkling of our projected air raid in force on Berlin with new chemical bombs. Our legation being instructed to advise neutrals that this apparent inhumanity is a rightful retaliatory measure for the needless murder of their long range gun firing on Paris and bombardment of our hospitals and dressing stations. Measure necessary to bring an end to enemy atrocities. Destroy this by fire on reading.
>
> —RAND.

The second message stated briefly that Elton's report on the German secret service had been received and approved. The third was even a more potent bit of work than the first. It read:

Ascertain and advise at all costs if Germans learn that our St. Mihiel offensive has been delayed fifteen days from original M day in order to mass newly trained artillery reserves. This must be treated with great caution. Destroy this letter by fire immediately upon reading.
—RAND.

Elton dwelt for some minutes upon the letters to make certain that there would be no telltale light in his eyes when he faced Mademoiselle Le Rivet. When he had finished with them he looked up with a helpless shrug of his shoulders.

"Under the circumstances," he said grimly, "it would be rather difficult for me to comply with my orders, would it not?"

"Oh, but your very shame at being an American should be hot enough to set them afire," she cried. "An air attack on Berlin with poison gases—death to innocent women and children! Is that your idea of war, you Americans!"

"Would you want me, mademoiselle," he inquired blandly, "to blame you for the Kaiser's war excesses—the shooting down of women and children in air raids on Paris and London, the murder of noncombatants in Belgium, the introduction of poison gases in battle?"

"But we have never used poison fumes to strangle innocent people," she cried, her whole being now aflame with horror and protest.

"What of Count Kulm's Black Book? Do you claim the right to destroy men's souls with your spy system as well as their bodies in battle?"

"Their weaknesses—Señora Quarazza—they are fair prey," she stammered incoherently. The terrible secret of that projected attack upon Berlin had completely unnerved her. "But those are nothing to this fiendish plot!"

"Please calm yourself, Mademoiselle Le Rivet," he urged with a grim smile. "We must remember that it is for us to accept what others decide—and since in your particular game you have the upper hand, you should be well enough satisfied."

She pointed a tense finger at him.

"Turn the boat at once to the quay!" she commanded. "At last I have been able to serve—to serve my country to some purpose today. Put me ashore instantly so I can get these letters of the devil to Count Kulm before it is too late!"

CHAPTER XXII

D DAY MINUS TWO DAYS

ON LANDING Mademoiselle Le Rivet at the Promenade du Lac, where a launch for the Von Kulm château was kept in readiness for urgent use of German agents, Elton rowed across to the Quai du Mont Blanc where he had rented the rowboat, and set out afoot through the streets of Geneva. His one difficulty was to maintain an unhurried gait. Outwardly he must remain a man of despair, one who has been the helpless cause of a serious blow to his country. Inwardly he was swept by the joyous surge of a great good fortune.

The German secret service had got those three letters from Rand in a way that would stand the test of the most expert examination. Had not a German agent seen them handed to him at the consulate, received them intact from his own hands a short while later? Colonel Rand had prepared those letters with consummate skill. If Von Kulm appraised them at par and passed them on to the general staff in Germany, the consequences would be far-reaching. A pending air attack in force on Berlin would set up feverish protective measures. The secret would be bound to leak to the civil populace. A scare at this time, so close on the heels of the smash-up of German armies on the Marne, would shake civilian morale in Berlin to the foundation. And since it is the will of the civil populace behind the lines that in the last analysis determines peace or victory, Elton knew that his mission to Switzerland had been worthwhile if this ruse went over, even if he accomplished nothing more.

Rand had shown rare cunning, too, in throwing the smoke screen on St. Mihiel. No matter what information the German agents in France had on the American attack date, this secret missive to Elton

would cast a doubt in the German military mind. If Rand's ruse were accepted by Von Kulm, the pending action to nip the great German salient in France might yet be launched before the German army was ready for it.

As to the real letters Rand had sent him, and which must remain in his pocket unread until late at night, Elton had little doubt of their contents. A reproduction of whatever symbols had been taken from the German invisible inks. He had stipulated before leaving France that some of them should be intercepted, developed and sent to him at Geneva for interpretation and action. Otherwise the whole case might be bungled in France through a lack of coordination.

Since the letters must wait until the dead of night, Elton put them out of his mind and settled down to a patient wait for nightfall. At eight he was to meet Rougemont at the Café du Nord. The Frenchman had hinted at information of the greatest importance to be imparted tonight. Then there was the matter of checking Sergeant Walters. Rand's second ruse letter led to a conclusion that the message entrusted to Walters had reached headquarters. But there might be a doubt on that score; and Elton knew that the German secret service must have had Walters' trail from the day he set foot across the Franco-Swiss frontier.

When, at eight o'clock, he entered the Café du Nord, Elton found Rougemont seated. With him was Jacques, the French boatman, and between them a bottle of champagne. They rose to welcome him and gave him a place at which there was a third glass, which Rougemont filled at once.

"Drink with us, monsieur, to a great enterprise," Rougemont proposed.

The Frenchman raised his glass formally, and his eyes glowed with a strange, misty sort of light, as if tears were held lightly under the surface. Jacques' face was set, and there was a grim sort of enthusiasm, almost a fanaticism, in his large black eyes.

"To the confusion of Von Kulm!" said Rougemont. "Soon may he find himself face to face with the outraged neutrality laws of Switzerland!"

Rougemont said this stoutly, but his eyes said something else—that this speech was an empty mouthing, for the benefit of the German reader of lips who had perched himself at a table nearby.

"I have another matter that is worrying me," said Elton, when they had drunk the toast to whatever strange purpose Rougemont had in his thoughts. He looked about the room searchingly. "An American deserter who defaulted with his company payroll is thought to be in Geneva. I was told to watch for him, and since I have had so little luck in doing anything else useful to my Service, I feel I must make good at this."

"If I can be of help to you, monsieur," said Rougemont, "please to command me."

"In the Café du Nord the other evening," Elton went on, "I saw a chap who looked suspicious; an unsociable fellow who looked to me as if he might have been an American. Ah, I see that there he is again—"

Elton indicated the suspect with a slight inclination of his head, a square shouldered, rugged man of forty who sat with his profile to them.

"Pardon me a moment, Captain Rougemont, and I will see if I can get him into conversation tonight," Elton excused himself abruptly.

Sergeant Walters, by good fortune, was seated with his back direct to the German mute. Elton sat down opposite him, so that Walters' form screened his own face from the German view.

"In the morning at eight walk the Boulevard Georges Favon until we meet," Elton instructed his assistant. "There may be something important—or there may be nothing."

"Yes, sir," said Walters.

"The shadows are hanging close to your trail, Walters?"

"For a few days they was pretty hot, sir. But now I don't see so much of them."

"You had no trouble getting the message through to Sands?"

"Nothing to speak of, sir—just had to give a squarehead the slip getting out of Geneva into the lake."

"I've just learned that you deserted from the United States Army taking your company payroll with you when you left France," Elton charged with the veriest flicker of a smile.

"Yes, sir, glad to know the particular kind of rascal I've turned out to be, sir." Walters grinned.

"And now, Walters, you'd better act as if you didn't want my company. Pay your bill and wander on—say over to the Kursaal, where there's good music and the lights are bright."

"Very good, sir."

WALTERS acted his part effectively as he rose, called for his bill and sulked out of the café. Elton returned to Rougemont's table.

"A suspicious fellow," he reported, "although I'm not sure he's my man. He wouldn't talk much and found he had to go some place else as soon as I sat down at his table; acted as if he resented my visit, don't you think? He'll bear some further watching."

Rougemont appeared somberly reflective and offered no comment. His eyes were brimming, though very bright; his cheeks were flushed by a suppressed excitement. Jacques' face was now deathly pale and drawn, and the strange fire in his eyes glowed with an added intensity. Rougemont filled the three glasses with a rare *meursault* which the waiter had just brought in and raised his own glass in the gesture of a toast, without words.

As Rougemont drank, the moisture in his eye gathered into a tear and coursed down his cheek. He attempted to conceal it with a hasty fleck of his hand. A second and third silent toast were drunk, then Rougemont beckoned for the waiter and called for his bill.

"A stroll on the quay, since time passes so heavy this evening," he said to Elton.

The three walked without speaking to the open space of the deserted Place du Rhone. Rougemont stopped shortly and spoke with an effort at self-control.

"Everything it is arranged, monsieur," he said. "Von Kulm he shall not escape this time!"

"You mean to try for his life again?" Elton asked without enthusiasm.

"We can not fail this time, monsieur."

"You have some one you are certain you can trust?"

"A cruel sacrifice, monsieur. But for France's every need there is a loyal soldier of France who is willing to give everything."

"A Frenchman, then, this time, Captain Rougemont? But how do you hope to break through the count's defense with one of your own agents?"

"There is a way of that, monsieur—a way that has sprung from the brain of my loyal Jacques. It shall be on the lake, while the count is returning to his château, when his escort will be helpless to interfere. Before he knows what has happened, Von Kulm shall wake up in hell, and his bodyguard with him, after we have rammed his boat."

Elton reflected briefly upon the possible flaws in such a maneuver.

"But I have no doubt the hull of Von Kulm's own launch is of steel," he warned. "Also, a boat rammed in Lake Geneva might easily make the shore before sinking — or the occupants might swim ashore."

Rougemont gave a mocking laugh.

"Or his Excellency and staff might be rescued promptly by the second boat that always follows him close behind, eh, monsieur? Ah but that devil's brain of his has failed him this time. For the boat that rams Von Kulm shall be filled with the high explosive, a charge that shall shake the lake into a frenzy, and cause Mont Blanc to tremble from the violence!"

The stark audacity of Rougemont's plan shook Elton, repelled him for the moment with its grim horror. Then he reminded himself that it was not for him to challenge the bitterness that Von Kulm's

actions had stirred in Rougemont. The ruthless death of Lomonosoff came into his mind; Von Kulm's whole career of ruthlessness.

"A boat such as that, if it should miss Von Kulm, might wreak a frightful damage on the Swiss shore," Elton pointed out.

"A detonator shall cause the explosion, monsieur," said Rougemont. "It shall all happen far out in the lake, as the count's launch passes through French waters. The strong arm of a good pilot shall see to it that our boat does not miss."

"But your own crew, Rougemont—how is it to escape your vengeance?"

The Frenchman's lips twisted in a forced smile.

"The crew, it do not escape, monsieur!"

Elton suddenly understood those toasts at the Café du Nord, the strange light in Jacques' eyes, the tear at Rougemont's cheek.

"Jacques—he is the one?" Elton gasped.

"But yes, monsieur," said Rougemont softly.

"Von Kulm's life isn't worth it," Elton protested impulsively. "You've got no right to send Jacques to such a death as that. There are other ways we can find to trap Von Kulm."

Rougemont's decision was fixed. He shook his head sadly and shrugged a deference to fate.

"The sacrifice magnificent," he said in a low voice, heavy with pathos. "Jacques' life as the price of Von Kulm's. It is the spirit of the *poilu*, monsieur; and Jacques would never breath a happy breath if he could not perform this great service, now that his body has been made so helpless by German wounds that he no longer can fight for France."

The Frenchman brushed a handkerchief across his eyes and his voice regained its firmness.

"I must tell you, monsieur, so you may prepare for the trapping of the rats that shall follow the end of Von Kulm. On the first night that Von Kulm comes to Geneva, you shall hear the roar on the lake, and know that the monster is no more. Then will you report at the rendezvous of the Café du Nord. Until then, monsieur, it is wise that we not be seen too much together. Adieu!"

A PICTURE filled Elton's mind as he returned slowly to the Beau Rivage, a picture of Jacques, the French boatman, with the stoop of his left shoulder from a shrapnel pellet in his spine, Jacques with a mottled purple scar across the breadth of his forehead. The Frenchman's eyes haunted him, the fervent light of a grim resolve to die for France. The picture stripped Rougemont's vengeance of its bleak horror, of its substance of crass assassination. It was only war—a life for a life. There was something so poignant in the picture that Elton shook himself, forced the vision out of his mind.

He turned to bed as soon as he reached the Beau Rivage. There were the letters to deal with as quickly as possible. Those letters might contain important information, new instructions. They might require prompt actions which must be planned before the morrow. And there lay immediately before him the great possibility for which he had come to Switzerland, the roundup of German spies which would be precipitated if Jacques' mad coup succeeded in wiping out Von Kulm.

As he lay in the darkened room he went over the names of German agents abroad he had gleaned. There were forty of them now, names and addresses memorized from the letters he had supplied to Monsieur Za. An easy matter to turn that list into a roundup of world wide proportions the moment the hour was ripe. He needed only to ask that Rand send alert operatives to the affected cities, to stand by ready to step in—an American net that would close on London, Paris, Le Havre, Marseilles, the vital communication points in France and unoccupied Belgium; on New York, Tokyo, Cairo, Rome, Montreal, Bombay. At the same time German espionage intriguers could be disclosed to

the police authorities of neutral capitals; Madrid, Buenos Aires, Mexico City, Peking, Christiania, even that unbelieving hotbed, Berne.

Von Kulm's death would be the signal for closing that net. But strongly as he had been moved by Jacques' readiness to make such a sacrifice, Elton found himself lacking in confidence that the plan would succeed. The intelligence that had baffled the Allied Secret Service for so long a time must have foreseen the possibility of such an attack on the lake, he reasoned. But there remained the possibility of success, against which he must prepare for prompt action.

At the end of an hour he stole into the clothes closet and opened the letters from Rand. As he expected, they were wholly in cipher. Except for one brief row of figures in the testament code, an acknowledgment of his secret reports, there were no instructions; a reassuring fact, since it meant that headquarters was not impatient, was leaving the Swiss situation in his hands without interference.

The intercepted German cipher messages were contained on three sheets of paper, one in each letter. Elton set down the familiar German key and sighed his relief when the symbols broke promptly into English letters. A change of cipher keys at this time, when he had neither time nor facilities for unraveling the tangle, would have placed him at a disadvantage. The first message was an order to Von Strindheim, in charge of the German underground nest in Paris, to send Agent 14 to Cairo to "take charge of the situation there." It ended with this vital bit of detailed information:

> Arrangements made to ship rifles, trench mortars to Egyptain coast for delivery to Abbas Hilmi's agents. Native feeling against British must be stirred to fighting heat, in order to divert British troops to that point.

The second message to Von Strindheim advised him that he need not concern himself further with a movement to stir a native uprising against the British in India. A shipload of rifles was already on the way from Seattle to India, and trusted operatives from Hongkong had been radioed to reenforce the Indian propaganda forces at Bombay.

It was the third message, however, that disclosed an intrigue far more dangerous than an intended German foment in British colonies. It read:

> Fifteen Russians, thoroughly trained in our work, will report at Paris on D day plus one day. These to be used in exploding munition factories at Paris and Bourges. They are available for any other missions you may have for them. They are of type that asks no questions, but must be paid promptly and generously to hold their loyalty. Urgent you entangle strong nucleus French Chamber of Deputies. St. Mihiel Order 9 received from your courier.

But even that message was swept into the background by a final line of figures appended to the missive. Deciphered, they read:

> His Excellency arrives D day minus two days. Complete all arrangements for his use of château of Villejuif. Conferences begin D day minus one day.

Elton read the messages through again twice, carefully, for the benefit of his memory, then reduced them to fine ashes and slipped from the stifling hole, his lungs gasping for air.

That final scrap of information drove away any thought of sleep. Through the night he lay considering its portentous possibilities. Von Kulm was going to Paris to meet with his key men in France. On D day, the regulation German symbol for the day of action, minus two days. If Jacques should fail now, there would remain the chance of trapping the Prussian master of spies in Paris, a procedure far more to Elton's liking.

But the date—D day minus two days—how was he to learn that? The reference was inscrutable in itself. It might mean this month or the month thereafter. If he could break that German secret, Von Kulm would be going to France into a trap. Elton resolved solemnly that in some way he must learn when Von Kulm slipped from the château on Lake Geneva and across the French frontier.

CHAPTER XXIII

A WARNING

WITHOUT stopping for his breakfast Elton was across the Rhone early the next morning. After circling through the Rue des Deux Ponts to the murky Arve, he followed the banks of that stream to the Pont D'Arve, turned north into the Avenue Henri Dunant and followed it northwest until it converged with the Georges Faven, which he reached a few minutes before eight o'clock. A logical promenade for a restless wayfarer in Geneva. As for his appointment with Walters, any account by German leg operatives of his meeting with Walters would be explained by the report of the lip reading agent who had recorded his conversation with Rougemont at the Café du Nord the night before.

Walters appeared with true military punctuality, strolling away from the Rhone so that they met face to face, coming from opposite directions.

"Our conversation must be very brief," said Elton, "and you must keep rather edging away, as if you didn't want to be bothered with me."

"Yes, sir," said Walters disconsolately. "I'm only wanting to say that this is a tough life here in Geneva with nothing carrying on and nobody to talk to."

"Things may be picking up," Elton replied quickly. "But right now it is important that I give you a message. I don't dare give you another cigar, but get these two numbers to Sands—seventeen, nineteen—and have him repeat them to Colonel Rand as quickly as possible."

"Seventeen, nineteen," repeated Walters. He was edging away slowly. "Yes, sir."

"Impress it on Sands that they are very important numbers, and he must be careful to get them right. Report in at the Café du Nord at the usual hour, as soon as you are back. If you have wine on your table, I'll know everything is O. K. If beer, I'll know the message didn't get through."

"Sir, may I ask the Cap'n a favor?" Walters tarried. "Make it beer if the message goes, wine if it doesn't."

"It doesn't make the slightest difference to me, if you think that's easier to remember."

"It isn't that, sir—but just because I'd sooner drink the beer."

"An excellent reason," said Elton, suppressing a smile. "But take care, Walters, that you don't discount those German shadows too far!"

"Yes, sir," said Walters gravely, and was on his way.

On the promenade of the Beau Rivage, as Elton approached the hotel, he saw Monsieur Za pacing restlessly back and forth. The little Austrian agent followed upstairs close at Elton's heels.

"You have kept me waiting," fretted Za. "My patience it is much upset."

"If you had regular hours of coming here," said Elton, "I'd know when to expect you. As it is, you take up so much of my time that I must slip out when I can to look after my own affairs."

"Ah, so the Captain was about his own business," exclaimed Za, suddenly mollified. He rolled his hands together.

"Out looking for the American deserter who stole the soldiers' payroll money, yes?"

"Who told you that, Za?" Elton demanded.

Za's chest inflated and his eyes sparkled an arrogant delight.

"You see, my Captain," he boasted, "the long ears of our secret service, they learn even your thoughts; so please to remember and have a care!"

There was, in Za's boastful warning, a stimulating assurance for Elton as he sat down to scribble the day's grist of letters. It told him that so far Sergeant Walters had escaped definite suspicion. That enhanced the sergeant's chances of getting through to headquarters the most important message Elton had ever sent to Colonel Rand.

These two terse code symbols would lay the world wide net Elton had planned for and hoped for before coming to Switzerland. The symbol number 17 was

the prearranged code word that would cause Rand to rush trained operatives to station in every important center in France, to send a "stand-by" warning to military operatives in every important capital outside France. Thereafter a fleet of terse cipher telegrams, sent out simultaneously from Paris when the time was ripe, would throw that army into action, closing Elton's far flung spy net. The symbol 19 would place a fast plane in instant readiness to respond at Elton's summons to a designated rendezvous on the frontier behind Thonon.

There would remain, then, only the trapping of Von Kulm to vitalize the haul of German spies. Elton knew that he gambled, perhaps extravagantly, in launching this alarm. Until the directing genius of the German secret service had been enmeshed, a roundup of his henchmen would only put Von Kulm to the bother of weaving a new web. But with two traps laid now, Elton had been forced to set his own stage on the chance that the German master of intrigue would fall into one of those traps.

Elton wrote the notes for Za expeditiously. He had his own reason for haste this morning, an eagerness to try his hand again with Mademoiselle Le Rivet. When the daily messages in invisible inks had followed their normal routine and Za saw Elton safely into the keeping of the woman operative, he launched immediately into this attempt as they walked toward the consulate.

"I've been puzzling a great deal over your hint of a duel," he said. "Will you not please tell me what you mean?"

"Evidently," said Mademoiselle Le Rivet, "monsieur does not believe me when I say I know everything of that disgraceful squabble."

"At least, mademoiselle," Elton angled, "you might confirm your knowledge by telling me the details."

"Certainly, monsieur, if you wish to hear," she said icily. "The attaché with whom you quarrel over señora—does it please you to hear repeated that his blood is on your hands!"

"I think I know what you mean," said Elton. "But I want you to know there was no duel."

"The subject it does not please me!" she replied scornfully. "Please that we speak of it no more, monsieur."

"As you please," he acceded grudgingly.

AFTER they had posted the German letters in invisible inks at the consulate they went to the Kursaal by horsecab where, during luncheon, Elton discreetly put aside his open efforts to break through Mademoiselle Le Rivet's guard and centered upon a study of her mood. She promptly retreated behind a mask of simulated lightness, but without effacing a certain cloud deep in her eyes or the artificiality of her attempts at occasional gaiety.

Elton shortly admitted himself over his depth as he tried to read behind her mask. Had she been of the usual adventuress type, the sort of woman spy he had been compelled to deal with in past operations, he told himself that he would find the answer in some unguarded gesture, some boast or vanity, some subtle overplaying of a rôle. But mademoiselle's complications were those of a very young woman, a mere girl, whom war had claimed for its mad adventures; even the prevalent fanatical patriotism could only fortify, without wholly destroying, her conscience, her sensitive nature, her own standards of right and wrong.

He divined that even if convinced of Von Kulm's excesses, no matter what reaction of horror they carried to her, she might not be shaken in her fealty to the service of the Fatherland. Even if she had learned the truth of Lomonosoff's murder, it might be that she would seek to work out her own adjustments, to plan her own way of visiting retribution upon the guilty through the government she served.

In such event Elton knew that he could expect no help from her, based on a possible revulsion against Von Kulm's methods; no information that would help him

in his present extremity against the German secret service. But he decided upon a final attempt to force her tongue, an attempt to be made on Lake Geneva where they would be alone. As they were leaving the Kursaal he suggested the ride on the lake.

"But it is impossible today, monsieur," she exclaimed. "I am to be seen about with you on the Grand Quai until three when a boat calls for me from the château."

"It must be that Señora Quarazza is bringing other fish to your net?" he thrust, with an insinuating smile that covered his disappointment.

"Why not?" she rejoined. "So long as there are so many sleek fish of our enemies greedy for the bait!"

"That reminds me I have seen nothing of your Spanish siren for several days, mademoiselle."

"I trust the loss does not distress monsieur too deeply."

"Not in the least. And your charming countess? Are you not at a disadvantage without at least one of your pretty decoys?"

She turned to him in sharp reproach.

"Of the countess you should not speak lightly, since at the present time she is in very great distress."

"I'm sorry. Not a matter of her work then, I gather?"

"But of the war, monsieur," Mademoiselle Le Rivet said thoughtfully. "The war—what terrible heartaches, what awful tragedies it brings into the world these black days."

"Some one close to her killed in battle?" Elton ventured softly, intent on keeping the conversation alive.

"That is the mystery of it, monsieur," she replied without hesitation. "Months ago my friend receives from Russia the terrible news that her husband is dead at the palace of the Czar. She mourns him long for dead—and now comes news that he has been seen alive at Petrograd within the month. It seems impossible that it is not some cruel mistake madame will find when she arrives at Petrograd, monsieur."

"May I light a cigaret, Mademoiselle Le Rivet?" Elton inquired absently.

They walked along the quay without speaking. Elton's pulse was racing at the astounding disclosure that had come to him out of the woman's remark.

"So—your countess is Russian?" he reflected presently.

"Of Silesia, monsieur, though married to a Russian while she and I were at school together."

Elton stopped and observed Mademoiselle Le Rivet closely as he spoke.

"She is Madame Lomonosoff, then?"

Mademoiselle Le Rivet started violently.

"Why do you say that, monsieur?" she gasped.

"If you are curious, also, as to the mystery of her husband, Vladimir Lomonosoff, formerly of the Czar's secret police," said Elton, "I can tell you that he is dead—wantonly shot down within the past week!"

"Monsieur, this is—you are attempting some trick!"

"Do you wish to hear what I have to say?"

She hesitated, her eyes searching his face for some hint of the treachery she suspected. His eyes were points of fire. The tragedy of the Russian agent was no longer veiled in mystery. He saw the devilish cunning that had staged the whole affair. Von Kulm had used one dangerous agent to destroy another, had staged Elton's visit to the château with Madame Lomonosoff and insidiously fired the Russian's mind with the thought that he faced his wife's betrayer in the American secret agent.

"You may speak, monsieur," Mademoiselle Le Rivet said finally. "But I am not to be fooled by mere words."

"You have already been fooled by words," Elton said hotly. "You were made a party to the murder of Vladimir Lomonosoff. His murder was the duel with which you have been taunting me—by which you have been deceived! When Vladimir came here incognito to hunt down his wife's alleged betrayer, Von

Kulm learned of the danger. He had you take me to the château, had me singled out to the Russian as the man against whom he had the great grievance. The whole story is clear to my eyes now. Vladimir attacked me with a gun which had been rendered harmless, and when I took it away from him, some one fired from hiding. Vladimir Lomonosoff fell dead at my feet—I was accused of his murder."

"A lie, monsieur!" she cried.

But her face grew ashen as she stood staring at Elton. Intuition must have carried to her mind a flash of the truth in what he said. Her defiance faded as she turned again up the quay at Elton's side. She stopped abruptly and confronted him.

"I am going to learn the truth of this, monsieur," she exclaimed, her voice half a threat.

"You already know the truth," he replied. "You would hardly expect his Excellency, or any of his assassins, to confirm what I have said."

"I shall know the truth—before tomorrow!" Her eyes grew cold and menacing. "If what you have said is a trick, you shall pay a sorry penalty for such audacity! Adieu, monsieur. I shall prefer to wait for my boat alone."

AS HE returned slowly to the Beau Rivage Elton coolly calculated the complications that might grow out of Mademoiselle Le Rivet's unintentional revelation. Her words had cleared up the mystery of Lomonosoff's attack on him, of the Russian's death. The woman agent's reactions to the tragic facts had confirmed Elton's certainty that she would recoil in horror at Von Kulm's excesses, even though they were perpetrated in the holy name of war. But what danger might come out of her efforts to verify what he had told her? What vengeance from the hand of Von Kulm, who would instantly see the dangerous purpose behind Elton's charge.

He spent a restless evening. At the Café du Nord, where he went for dinner, Rougemont was not in evidence. Nor did Walters appear as the evening wore on. Walters' absence caused him only a vague uneasiness. It was likely enough that the sergeant had been compelled to wait for darkness before striking out into the lake for Thonon.

When Za called in the morning Elton searched the Austrian's face closely. But the mercurial Za failed to register anything unusual in the air. His arrogant chatter was reassuring. Mademoiselle Le Rivet was waiting as usual to see the letters into the mail. She met him with an attempt at lightness that puzzled him, that baffled his feverish impatience to read her thoughts. Had she learned the truth? Or had her efforts to learn the story of Lomonosoff merely carried a warning to Von Kulm?

"Today may I suggest a ride on the lake?" he asked pointedly.

She shook her head, without looking at him.

"As soon as we have been to the consulate, I return immediately to the château, monsieur," she replied, attempting unconcern. "So you see you shall not be bothered by me so very long today."

"You have not found out, then, of the matter we talked of yesterday on the quay?"

She did not reply at once, nor was Elton able to divine her mood from the placid mask in which she had set her features.

"Please believe, monsieur," she said in a low voice, after a time, "that if such a thing as you told me could be true, my people would not approve, nor would his imperial Majesty, the emperor."

"Perhaps not," said Elton, pausing to weigh his words before he spoke. "But is not Von Kulm the imperial representative in Switzerland?"

"If so, monsieur, there are the limits to his authority."

"Then if you find that he has outraged his authority, Mademoiselle Le Rivet, is it not your duty to report the facts—or approve them by your silence?"

"I read your purpose, monsieur," she

replied, meeting his eyes firmly. "But your interest is the interest of an enemy—to which I will not listen. But there is another matter of which I have decided to speak, when you have left your consulate."

"My letters, mademoiselle," he tested her. "If there is mail for me from France, may I have it for myself, or must it go to Lomonosoff's murderers?"

"The letters you will give to me," she said firmly. "I am not forgetting my duty."

Elton mailed the German messages, counting them into the consul's hands one at a time while Mademoiselle Le Rivet looked on. There was, to Elton's discomfort, no mail for him from headquarters. They left the consulate together and walked briskly to the lake without speaking until they came to the broad promenade of the Grand Quai. The woman's evident haste to embark, a certain show of purpose, caught his attention, aroused his interest.

"You will report tomorrow to watch the letters into the mail, of course?" he inquired.

"You are very subtle," she charged. "But to save you subterfuges, I do not know how soon I shall be leaving Geneva."

"For Germany?"

"A silly question. But I have told you what I have only because I have my own purpose in doing so."

"Well?"

"The American, Captain Farnham," she lowered her voice. "He is your good friend?"

"On the contrary, have I not good reason to suspect that he is in the service of Germany, an American masquerader—a spy double who does Von Kulm's bidding?"

"But no," she said in protest, "no more than are you, monsieur. By force he is held to receive the letters you write, precisely as you are compelled to write them."

"How am I to know the truth of that, mademoiselle?"

"I swear it, monsieur!" she cried. "The Monsieur Farnham was not even the—the fair prey of Señora Quarazza. If what I say were not the truth I would not give you this warning." Mademoiselle dropped her voice to a whisper. "You must get to him the warning that after the Saturday of this week, he must hurry away from Paris, even surrender himself to the American prison if he finds no other escape."

"But—I thought he was too valuable to Count Kulm to be—disposed of!"

"Also, monsieur, a warning for you." She ignored his exclamation. "You must escape from Switzerland."

He regarded her with a blank stare.

"But that is not so easy, when I am shadowed even in my sleep—a prisoner held to send these abominable letters!"

"On the day that I do not come, there are to be no more letters, monsieur. Then, if you can not escape, take refuge in your legation at Berne," she warned.

"So, the gentle Count von Kulm wants us Americans out of the way when we have served his purpose. Is that your meaning, mademoiselle?"

Mademoiselle Le Rivet drew herself together and extended her hand.

"Adieu, monsieur," she said. "You have had your fair warning—and there is nothing more I have to say to you."

CHAPTER XXIV

ROUGEMONT'S TWO CANES

SOME momentous mischief was in the forging at the château of Von Kulm. Mademoiselle Le Rivet's warning gave Elton the hint; and as his mind reenacted the interview with her, searching out every mood, look and sentence, he accepted it as fact that the mysterious D day of the German secret service was in the offing.

Of the woman agent's sincerity, he found no doubt. His efforts to trace in her actions some hint of another trap, some intimation of treachery, found no substance. On the other hand, her motive in warning him was now easily traceable and natural enough. Von Kulm's meth-

ods had outraged her conscience but without unbalancing her sense of loyalty to the Fatherland. She had merely tried to strike a balance to compensate for her own part in the shameless trapping of the two Americans. Her warning had told Elton that he and Farnham were to be put out of the way by Von Kulm. There was no other logical deduction. That fact alone was eloquent of the larger purpose of the German secret service.

Once the projected maneuver in which the two Americans had been used was at a climax, their usefulness would be at an end. Use of agents of dubious loyalty must be of short duration. That rule was axiomatic. From Von Kulm's point of view there would be a senseless risk in holding the two Americans too long against their will; and destroying them would be the simplest and most effective riddance.

But how close was he to the danger point? Elton tried to reason this out, not in personal fear but for the vital light it would shed on the elusive Von Kulm D day. Once Von Kulm was through with him he knew that the shadows would follow with a sensitive hand on their weapons, ready to strike at the first easy pretext. They would report an attempted escape to Von Kulm; he would smile understandingly, and if there should be any stir at the legations, it would be discreetly proven that the dead man was merely an abominable spy double, an agent of two countries killed in a private brawl. Whereupon every one would want to wash their hands of the affair as quickly as possible.

The day was Monday. Until Saturday, four full days intervened. To the woman's warning that Farnham would be in danger on Saturday, Elton applied the information from the intercepted message in invisible inks—D day minus two days, the military code date set for Von Kulm's arrival at the château of Villejuif, in the environs of Paris. If Von Kulm did not change his schedule, it might mean that the German spy master would reach Paris on Saturday, or even that Saturday was the D day itself of the German espionage coup that was to be launched from the French capital.

As he went down to a late dinner at the Beau Rivage, Elton shut these considerations from his mind. His plans were laid; he was ready to act; everything hereafter must depend on eventualities as they arose. He must have a clear mind, alert and receptive to the slightest currents in the German secret service storm that now was brewing swiftly on Lake Geneva.

Mademoiselle's warning to him might conceivably be guessed at the château from her actions; there remained the remote possibility that her warning was part of some subtle trick, or Von Kulm might change or delay or even cancel his projected invasion of Paris.

But as he took his seat in the dining room and glanced casually about he felt the leap of his nerves at a sight which brought him face to face with a crisis. Through the palms at the end of the room, he saw Count Kulm and his retinue, dining tonight in public. He picked up his menu card with a steady hand and centered his eyes on it, without seeing the words. If Von Kulm returned to his château tonight the hour of French vengeance was close at hand. If Jacques succeeded, the German D day would no longer matter.

He forced himself to loiter through an insufferable meal, to eat food which he did not taste, until the count's party finally left the Beau Rivage. There was the usual clicking of heels among the military guests as the count's party went out, the usual guarded formation; one man leading, Von Kulm with a retainer at his side, then the massive Herr Sirwolten flanked by two stiff German mannikins, a seventh retainer trailing several yards behind.

After a wait of ten minutes Elton followed out. The count's party was not in evidence. He took a seat on the terrace and searched the surface of the lake, but no craft was visible in the uncertain light. As darkness deepened he crossed over to the Café du Nord to wait there. His

heart sank as he saw that Walters was not there again tonight. An hour passed, to deepen his anxiety. What had happened to Walters? If he had gotten through he would be here tonight, without failure. Had the German shadows tripped him on his way to Thonon? If so, Elton knew that Walters must be dead. The veteran would try to shoot his way through, would never yield to arrest when he knew the importance of the message he carried.

The evening dragged along interminably. Rougemont did not appear. Elton sat alone, sipping tasteless wine, pretending bored nonchalance, while he was wracked by his fear for Walters, by the suspense of waiting for the detonation that would sound the doom of Von Kulm.

By ten o'clock he knew that Von Kulm's party had reached the château long since, even by the most circuitous route, had they embarked from the Quai du Mont Blanc immediately after dinner. But he held on, with thinning hope, watching covertly each new arrival for sight of Walters, arguing that Von Kulm might have waited over in Geneva.

Shortly before eleven there was a quick flash in the room, like the flicker of a heliograph. It was without sound, without substance, an instantaneous quiver of light. Several people caught it and looked about curiously. One, two, three seconds ticked by, then above the hum of the music, the chatter and laughter, there crashed a hideous detonation. Women screamed; men leaped to their feet; the Café du Nord broke into an excited uproar.

The French *avions* have mistaken Geneva for Ulm! No, the Germans have attacked Switzerland! Excited voices shrieked in the jargon of many tongues. When a minute passed without a recurrence of the alarm, the orchestras struck up lively airs, the panic subsided, a few resumed dancing, the waiters were kept busy carrying liquors for shaken nerves. A waiter reported that the boilers of a factory had exploded. Nothing to be given a second thought. Very shortly, since there was no danger, the Café du Nord had resumed its wonted gaiety; swirling dances, quickening music, clinking glasses, clandestine trysts, giddy chatter.

Elton sat immobile through the commotion, his eyes upon the cover of his table. Portentous as was that report, his first response was one of acute depression, his first thought of the heroic Frenchman, Jacques, who had sent himself to eternity in that crash. He shook himself, presently, out of this morbid humor, reminding himself sharply that it was not a time for sentiment. If Von Kulm had been destroyed vital action impended. He would need time only to verify the fact, make certain that the directing genius of the German secret service was wiped out; then for his own flight across the frontier —and the drawing of the net.

Rougemont came in a few minutes later and, sighting Elton, came to his table. The Frenchman made a brave effort to contain himself. He greeted Elton with studied unconcern, sat down, ordered wine brought to the table and lighted a cigaret with a firm hand. But the light in his eyes told Elton of Rougemont's inner turmoil, a changing light that one moment burned with a triumphant fire, then dimmed into a misty film.

"You have heard, monsieur," said Rougemont in a strained voice, "that a boiler has exploded in one of the factories of Geneva?"

"The waiters were saying as much a short time ago," Elton replied with detachment.

Rougemont sat back and affected to smother a yawn.

"Since nothing better offers itself tonight, monsieur," he proposed, "let us stroll up the lake and look at the wreckage."

"If it is not too far," Elton agreed indifferently. "The hour is growing late, and I am rather sleepy."

"Before we go, monsieur—"

The Frenchman lifted his glass, a poignant pathos in his eyes.

CAPTAIN ROUGEMONT set out at a brisk pace to the north on the lake promenade. Twice within the first few hundred yards he halted passers-by to inquire of the explosion. When they disclaimed any knowledge of the cause or place of the detonation he slowed down to a leisurely gait.

"The rubber heels of the Boche are close behind us," he commented. "When they interview those whom I have accosted they will conclude that we merely hunt diversion. There is much we have to consider tonight, monsieur."

"Jacques appears to have succeeded," said Elton grimly.

"But yes, monsieur, poor Jacques—he is gone," Rougemont shrugged, then snapped himself erect. "But for the time, I must yield no place to sorrow. Since Jacques has done his part, there is much that we must do now, monsieur!"

"You have your plans of what you propose next, Captain Rougemont?"

"It is very simple, monsieur. From Berne and Basel and the eastern frontier we will bring our operatives and quickly rid the lake of its insects. Before the coming of Von Kulm we trapped them as you would mice, and again we shall be able to do so; is it not so?"

"You are sending for your men at once?"

"Not, monsieur, until I have verified what happened tonight. If by some miracle Von Kulm has escaped—"

"But just how do you propose to verify that?"

"For that I have gone to great pains, monsieur. A boat with our divers from Thonon will be on the lake at dawn. And then, too, we have a means of knowing whether Von Kulm will be about in his flower beds outside his château at sun up in the morning. From a nearby estate, powerful French glasses are able to learn something of what goes on at the château."

"That should leave no room for doubt," said Elton. He added eagerly, "If I can only arrange to have your verification as soon as you are certain, it will be of great help to me, Captain."

"By seven we shall know, monsieur," Rougemont asserted. "By eight I will be ready to convey to you the information."

"At the Café du Nord?"

Rougemont considered briefly.

"I think that would be most indiscreet, monsieur," he reflected. "We must remember that for the time being the Swiss secret police will be most curious of tonight's affair. It is better that we not be seen with our heads together."

"By what means will you let me know, then, my Captain?"

"A simple indication, monsieur. At eight I will pass the terraces of the Beau Rivage. If in my hand the head of my cane it is of gold, you will know that Von Kulm is dead; if of silver it will mean that we have not yet fully satisfied ourselves of the facts. But if I carry no cane—*voila!* You will know that poor Jacques, he died to no purpose."

"That will do well enough, Captain Rougemont, but there remains another very great service I would like to ask of you. First let me ask you a question."

"Of course, monsieur."

"You are able to send telegrams to D'Auteuil at Paris through your consulate at Geneva or your legation at Berne?"

"It is most impossible, monsieur," Rougemont exclaimed quickly. "I am the secret agent—whom my legation must repudiate if I should get into trouble with the Swiss. So with the French legation I must have no open dealings."

"Our governments make rather unusual claims upon us, do they not?" Elton rejoined with an ironical smile. "But it is very important that I get through a message at once."

"Ah, but if it is brief, I have the way. A telegram to a business associate in Paris, who receives it for Monsieur d'Auteuil of our secret service. But it must be very brief, and say nothing that would carry the suspicion, monsieur."

"Simply the two figures—17-19—nothing more. D'Auteuil will understand instantly, and relay it to American head-

quarters. Let me explain that I sent a messenger, who has not returned from Thonon."

"Ah—the waters of Thonon—though it is of France, monsieur, the Boche are desperate in watching the approaches of Thonon. But your message, I will place it on the wires from Geneva."

"If you please, Captain Rougemont, and remember its importance. That message provides for my flight from the frontier to Paris, where I must go in the greatest haste if Von Kulm is done."

Rougemont stopped.

"Do you mean, monsieur," he asked in astonishment, "that you plan to leave Geneva at once? But have you planned the means of your escape to the frontier?"

"I intend to get a fast boat to Thonon and go by plane from there. I had been counting upon my assistant to arrange that detail—since he has been passing back and forth. But that seems impossible now."

"*Sacrebleu!*" swore Rougemont. "The Boche will have his eyes close to you, monsieur. The death of Von Kulm will not stop his patrols of the lake—his launches will drive now with a thirst for vengeance!"

"I will have to take that risk," Elton replied quietly. "I must trust the details to no one, Captain Rougemont; but D'Auteuil will tell you later that no man of the secret service ever went on more urgent business than that which takes me to Paris, when the minute comes to strike."

The Frenchman regarded Elton in tense indecision.

"The *Filisur*, monsieur, it alone is certain," he said impulsively. "If it is so urgent that you must go—the *Filisur*, it shall carry you when you are ready."

"The *Filisur?*" Elton puzzled. "Was it not the *Filisur*—?"

"But no, monsieur," Rougemont cut him off. His voice broke as he went on. "Jacques, he love the *Filisur* better than his own life. An amazing fellow, Jacques, was he not? He pleaded with me that the *Filisur* should be saved, and wept so much of it that I was compelled to purchase for him another craft for which he had formed no affection. So, monsieur, the *Filisur* remains here ready to serve France!"

"Thank you, Captain Rougemont. You have helped me more than I can tell you. But how is it to be arranged?"

The Frenchman's mind worked incisively.

"If the cane I carry is headed in gold," he said at once, "the *Filisur* will be moored at eight of the evening at the first landing projection along the Promenade du Lac, immediately above the Pont du Mont Blanc. You will need only to come aboard, monsieur."

CHAPTER XXV

THREE MEN IN A BOAT

ELTON was a man without emotion as he went the next morning just before eight o'clock to the terrace of the Beau Rivage overlooking the promenade along which Rougemont was to pass. A sound night's sleep, a sense of the day's responsibilities, steeled him against restlessness, anxiety, or even the thrill of adventure. But behind his refuge of passivity his mind was alert, ready for quick decisions, and there was the light of confidence in his blue eyes.

He did not see Rougemont until the Frenchman was passing directly in front of him, and as he read the news he gave no indication of interest. Rougemont carried a gold headed walking stick. There was no mistaking the message he brought. The head glittered yellow in the morning sun as Rougemont swung it jauntily, and there was a lightness in the Frenchman's step, an air of triumph about his whole manner, that was as eloquent as his prearranged signal.

There was no reason to doubt Rougemont's judgment. He had proven his thoroughness by employing divers to confirm the results of Jacques' desperate handiwork on Lake Geneva, and by establishing a watch over Von Kulm's gardens. But Elton had decided to wait

upon the morning's further developments, for the visit of Monsieur Za and of Mademoiselle Le Rivet. Their failure would be to him a final confirmation. He would be ready then to act. It would confirm not only the death of Von Kulm, but the demoralization of the group of henchmen that surrounded von Kulm.

He had risen to leave the terrace a few minutes later, when Za appeared suddenly on the promenade, coming from the direction of the Kursaal. Elton turned down the steps as if leaving the hotel and came face to face with the Austrian. Za's face gave an instant confirmation of tense emotions which he strove to conceal.

"My Captain is about early this morning—looking for the American absconder again?"

Za's effort to speak easily only intensified the tight set of bloodless lips, the vindictive glint of his eyes.

"You are very early for your letters this morning." Elton ignored the veiled thrust. "Perhaps we should fix daylight as the time of your visits hereafter, eh?"

"The letters," said Za, affecting nonchalance, "they may wait this morning, if monsieur will but stroll with me to the Place des Alps where we will be free to speak without interruption upon a matter of importance."

"Certainly," Elton agreed, falling in step beside the little agent.

Clearly as he sensed some sinister purpose in this early morning promenade, Elton maintained his usual attitude toward the Austrian. The Place des Alps was in the heart of the city, and Elton guessed that Za had no business with him there. If Za merely fished for information, Elton knew that the fellow would yield much and receive nothing in return.

In the middle of the first square, as they left the lake front, Za stopped suddenly. His face was as colorless as his faded straw hair, his eyes blazed fitfully, a man who hovers between murder and funk.

"I place you under the arrest, my Captain!" he blurted. Having said this, he gained courage. "You will please do as I say or the consequence, it will be most disagreeable."

Elton replied with a taunting laugh.

"You are quite a humorist, Monsieur Za! By what authority could a German agent place any one under arrest on the streets of Geneva?"

"It is the orders of his Excellency," said Za nervously. "But you will please not argue with me of what you must do."

"Don't be ridiculous, Za, or I'll lose my temper in another moment!"

Za quailed at the threat in Elton's voice, gave a quick look along the street, then pulled himself together and returned Elton's glare.

"Ah, but the Captain, he will do as I say!" he sneered. "Let me warn you fairly, my Captain. Close at hand you may see our agents—four of them—whose eyes are on you at this moment. From behind the drawn blinds of the building across from us there are other eyes that watch for me to but lift my hat from my head—and if I do so—my dear Captain, you are dead on the street on the instant! Your feet they are fixed in the trap from which you can not escape, my Captain, so will you listen to the reason?"

It was Za's sudden assurance, his return of courage, that convinced Elton. A man of courage might have pulled such a bluff, but not Za. Elton accepted the situation quickly and calmly, in a play for time.

"What is it you want of me?" he demanded.

"His Excellency, the Count von Kulm, have ordered that you be brought immediately to his château for some questions, my Captain," said Za in vast relief.

Elton smiled easily.

"Well, if that's all, why didn't you say so in the first place? But don't think you could bluff me into one of these Swiss jails, Monsieur Za."

Za turned back to the Quai du Mont Blanc. Elton, as he walked along beside the Austrian, estimated this unexpected situation rapidly. Two shadows had closed in upon them, following at a distance of half a dozen paces; two others

were on their flank across the street. He identified them as the desperate leg man type of operative, men who would not hesitate to shoot even in daylight on the streets of Geneva.

The trap into which he had landed smacked of something more complicated than Za's mind would be expected to fabricate. The fact that it had followed so closely upon the night's tragedy showed an absence of complete demoralization at the château, such as might be expected to follow the death of the German spy-master.

Elton tried to estimate his own situation. Once in a German launch on Lake Geneva he knew that he would be helpless. His one chance, then, was at the quay, a sudden bolt into a cubbyhole, his automatic blazing as he went. He would have at least a chance, perhaps better than an even chance in such a play, he argued.

But against this gamble the thought of his mission loomed up in his mind. The mystery of Za's summons, did it mean that Rougemont had made some sorry miscalculation after all? Was the intelligence that directed the German secret operations still in the flesh? By the time he was halfway across the quay Elton had decided his course. He would see the thing through, a risk in the line of duty. A bolt now, even though it succeeded in saving his life, might cheat his mission.

There was something mocking in the peaceful grandeur of the blue lake with its panorama of mirrored peaks as the launch sped to the château. It stirred Elton with no sense of beauty, as he sat looking out over its placid surface with untroubled eyes. It seemed only to shield from him the inscrutable mystery of Von Kulm upon which everything must depend. He felt Za's eyes fixed on him and turned sharply as they approached the château.

"An explosion of a boiler on the shores of the lake last night, monsieur—" he led casually— "you heard the sound?"

"The explosion of a factory, yes," affirmed Za indifferently, and lapsed into silence.

THE BOAT nosed to a landing at Von Kulm's elevator pier. Za, Elton and the four guards were lifted to the château, and Za led the way at a smart pace through the reception halls to a broad terrace overlooking the lake where a large man was seated under a vine bower engrossed in a mass of papers. Half a dozen others were in the room, doing nothing; they might have been figures in wax.

Elton saw that Von Kulm was not present. The man under the vine bower was Herr Sirwolten, the other faces unfamiliar except for two whom he identified as members of the Von Kulm bodyguard. During the several minutes that he was left standing with Za while Herr Sirwolten continued his labors Elton attempted to sense what tension was in the air. But he saw that Sirwolten was genuinely occupied with his work, while the others were as stolid and devoid of expression as the grim mannikins they suggested.

Herr Sirwolten looked up presently and, seeing Elton, laid aside his work and leaned back, his face relaxing. Elton returned the German agent's look with an easy nonchalance.

"I understand the Count von Kulm wished to interview me?" Elton broke the subtle conflict of eyes.

"I note you are impatient," said Sirwolten circumspectly. "Impatient to know why you were sent for—which is in itself the symptom of a bad conscience, Monsieur Elton."

"You expect me to feel very much at home here, Herr Sirwolten?" Elton replied with the flicker of a smile.

"At least you make an excellent front of it, monsieur. But much as I would enjoy fencing with you this morning, my time is pressing. The count is in his gardens for a breath of air at present and has directed me to conduct the matter which must be disposed of this morning. I will be very blunt, monsieur. You are charged with treason. You are in the presence of the tribunal that will hear these charges and decide your guilt or innocence."

There was a mild defiance in the sparkle of Elton's mirth.

"Treason—to whom?" he inquired.

"Treason to the imperial Prussian crown, monsieur."

"Herr Sirwolten will please to remember," said Elton easily, "that I took your obligation under duress and with distinct mental reservations."

"The reservations were of your own making, Monsieur Elton. They meant, and I—we—so accepted them, that you would escape from your bargain if you could. But the fact that you are here shows that you failed. We assume not merely the technical but the moral right to try you, therefore."

"Since you have decided that, Herr Sirwolten, you might as well declare me guilty of whatever you have in mind. I ask only out of curiosity what specific charges you hold against me."

"You are responsible for the death of three of our loyal agents!" said Sirwolten. He spoke without feeling, hurriedly, as if time pressed. "So you must face the consequence of their—murder."

Elton's lips tightened involuntarily as he heard the charge. A charge of complicity in Jacques' mad vengeance, he sensed instantly.

"Murder appears your favorite charge, Herr Sirwolten," he said, quickly recovering himself. "I have had no more part in the killing of three of your agents than in the murder of Vladimir Lomonosoff, as you must well know."

"For economy of time I will cite the evidence, monsieur," Sirwolten replied, speaking in a quick staccato. "An American spy runner who could only have been carrying a secret message from you to your chief in France was called upon to halt by our agents near Thonon the night before last. He replied with gunfire, shooting down three of our men before he was himself killed. No message was found upon him, from which we are left to infer that he carried it concealed in his mouth and swallowed it before he died. Do you deny that the man was your messenger?"

For the briefest fraction of a second Elton's surge of emotion rose to the surface as he heard the confirmation of a gnawing fear. The death of Walters was a blow that shook his self-control. But he was instantly master of himself again.

"I admit nothing, Herr Sirwolten," he said.

"Ah, but your face it confessed much to me, monsieur," said Sirwolten. "I discern that in addition to the loss of whatever message you sent, you suffer a strong attachment for the crafty rascal whose body was tossed into the deepest part of Lake Geneva an hour later!"

"That, of course," sneered Elton, "was not murder, eh?"

"Not from my point of view at least, monsieur; and it is our point of view that prevails on Lake Geneva."

"Well?"

"I have stated the facts; is there any statement you wish to make in your own behalf?"

"None, Herr Sirwolten."

"Then I will ask the decision of the tribunal."

He turned to the six mannikins. Each nodded solemnly in turn, without speaking.

"You are found guilty, monsieur. In the absence of his Excellency, it is my responsibility to pass sentence. The penalty is death."

Elton managed a smile of cynical amusement.

"I congratulate your tribunal upon its expedition, Herr Sirwolten, and you upon your prompt approval. The obsequies—my murder—does it occur before or after lunch?"

"Again, my necessity intervenes in your behalf, monsieur," said Sirwolten. His eyes softened into an appraising smile. "You are such a cool and calculating rascal, that it would interest me vastly at seeing how much of it is bluster, how much of your *sang froid* you could muster as you stood over your grave. But since I must leave instantly for Berlin for council with his imperial Majesty the emperor, I am leaving the sentence in your own hands."

"You are very generous, Herr Sirwol-

ten, but not particularly clear in your statement."

"I mean that I am suspending the sentence of death for the time being. That, my dear Monsieur Elton, is not because of sentiment, nor is it because you do not richly deserve death by a firing squad. But as I have said, we have use for you. Monsieur Za will return you again to Geneva with letters that now await your signature. But if, by the slightest treachery, you again betray our trust, our agents are instructed to put the sentence into instant effect. Do I now make myself quite clear, monsieur?"

"Your English is excellent, Herr Sirwolten."

The German's only reply was an impatient toss of his head. He slid forward in his chair and buried his massive head again in the papers before him. Elton saw that it was not a pose. Sirwolten was genuinely engrossed again with his affairs, the incident of the American dismissed from his mind.

The hand of Za on his arm brought Elton out of his scrutiny of Herr Sirwolten.

"You will come with me?" said Za in a thin little voice induced by the presence of his superiors. He added in a stouter voice as they reentered the château, "The letters, we have prepared them today for you, my Captain. You will sign them at once."

They stopped at a great carved table of the outer reception hall where a servant in the uniform of the château laid them out for Elton's signature. In the midst of his labors he heard Za and the servant click their heels and glanced up to see the bristling figure of Von Kulm walking through the room. The count did not notice them as he proceeded on through the château and disappeared on to the terrace where Herr Sirwolten labored.

"His Excellency is in the most perfect health this morning," said Za, a mere aside, addressed to the servant.

Elton, bent close over the letters, made an erractic twitch of his pen in signing his name. The man who had just passed through bore the impression of Count von Kulm, the count's carriage, his face, his type, his stature. But Elton's photographic mind had detected the difference. A spark of suspicion that had been smoldering in his mind for many days leaped into a light of understanding. He signed the forty letters with slow precision while he thought rapidly.

"Mademoiselle Le Rivet," he inquired of Za as they went to the launch for the return to Geneva, "she will meet us at the quay as usual?"

"It is I, my Captain, who will go with you today to your consulate," said Za. "Mademoiselle accompanies his Excellency to Berlin."

"But—but might you not arouse suspicion, Monsieur Za?" Elton asked in astonishment.

"It is but for today I go to your consulate," Za reassured. "Tomorrow, perhaps, there will be no letters, nor the day after; perhaps no letters for your mails until Mademoiselle Le Rivet is returned from Berlin."

"Thank you for telling me," said Elton softly.

When, after landing at the quay, they had placed the daily grist of the German invisible inks in the American mail, Za took curt leave, returning immediately to the quay and boarding the launch to the château. Elton returned to the Beau Rivage. There he inspected his clothes, summoned the valet to take several suits for pressing, assembled his laundry and busied himself with a book until dinner time. In the first glow of the Alpine sunset he went to the Café du Nord for dinner.

He dragged his dinner until the hour of eight. His tension rose as the minute hands crept toward that hour. He had summoned the head waiter to pay his bill, when his blood leaped at sight of Walters taking a seat at a nearby table. He sat blinking for a moment at the apparition. Walters, alive! He felt an impulse to rush to the sergeant's table and clap him on the shoulder.

A waiter brought two bottles to Walters' table. Elton's brows converged

as he saw them—one of wine, one of beer. Walters took the bottle of beer and poured a brimming glass. He was drinking it when Elton reached his table and sat down.

"You are armed, Sergeant?" he inquired.

"If you don't believe me, ask the Dutch, sir," said Walters with a significant grin.

"Come with me, Walters, and follow close."

"But—" Walters cast an injured look at the unfinished beer— "yes, sir."

Outside, Elton set a leisurely pace; two men strolling down the quay with their heads together. He sensed the German shadows close at their heels. As he came to the narrow landing pier on the Promenade du Lac, just above the Pont du Mont Blanc, he turned out at a quickened pace, shoved Walters into the bobbing *Filisur* and leaped into the boat himself.

"What's up now, sir?" Walters inquired anxiously.

"Everything," said Elton. "We're on our way out!"

CHAPTER XXVI

ACROSS THE LAKE

"*BIEN, MESSIEURS!*" The exclamation was Rougemont's as he set the *Filisur* into motion, churning the lake with powerful motors as she shot straight out toward the Quai du Mont Blanc until she reached midstream, then swung sharply to the north. Rougemont gave his whole attention to motors and rudder, dodging in and out past the small pleasure craft that dotted the lake, occasionally adding a bit of momentum to the speed of the *Filisur*. Elton and Walters sat to one side in the stern, their eyes searching the fading shore line. But their shadows, after a short dash out on to the pier, had disappeared.

As they flashed under the lights of the Jettée des Eaux Vives, Rougemont made a slight change of course to the left, toward the lights of the Des Paquis on the opposite shore, and turned his eyes back upon the fading ribbons of light.

"Ah, the Boches—they are quick to perceive!" he cried suddenly, pointing a tense finger.

Elton saw the shadowy gray hulk with a pennant of white foam at its bow cutting through the light of the jetty. The German secret service shadows had not been slow in organizing pursuit. As he watched the craft in their wake Elton sensed that it was traveling at a higher rate of speed than the *Filisur*.

"We will be able to outrun them with the *Filisur?*" he asked of Rougemont.

"But no, monsieur," the Frenchman replied frankly. "It is that follows us one of the twin ships of the Von Kulm fleet, that travel with the speed of the express train!"

"A fight, then!" said Elton. "How long will it take them to overtake us?"

Rougemont shook his head and gave a sly laugh.

"The Boche, we will fool him! Not until he has learned our intentions will he attempt to close in. If we go to Nyon for the anchor he will hang about for a time and slink away before the moon comes out over the lake, monsieur."

"Nyon?" puzzled Elton. "But Nyon is on the Swiss side. It is at Thonon I must land, my Captain."

"Of course, monsieur. But at Nyon, when our Boche escort have slipped away, we will cross before the rising of the moon and hug the shore of France until we enter Thonon. It will save us the trouble, monsieur, of a fight with the Boche."

The *Filisur* roared on up the lake with lights on, Rougemont straining intently into the uncertain light ahead to avoid collision with transient craft. Two hundred meters behind clung Von Kulm's launch, from time to time flashing a finger of light to the *Filisur* as if to make sure that the Frenchman had not slipped away. The Germans were making no effort to catch up, content first to explore the *Filisur's* intentions, as Rougemont had predicted.

As the flight settled down, Elton reached over impulsively and wrung Walters' hand.

"A bit late, but this is my first chance," he exclaimed. "I never was so glad to see any one in my life. I'd just given you up for dead!"

"No, sir, a close call, Cap'n," said Walters. "But they got poor Sands."

"Sands! They killed Sands?"

"Yes, sir. But they paid a sweet price for it, Cap'n! Sands meets me in a brush thicket just outside Thonon. I give him the message, sir—17-19—to take on to the colonel at headquarters. I was walking with him to where he has his motorcycle hid out in some bushes when out comes three men who must of been watching his motorcycle for something to happen. When we move on, they start shooting. So did I, Cap'n. I got the three of them, but they got Sands, got him right through the neck, sir, and he was dead when I leant over him to see."

"Poor Sands," said Elton thoughtfully. "His death accounts for the report I got. The Boche evidently did not learn there were two of you."

"No, sir, there wasn't anybody left of them to give out details."

"You had trouble getting back into Geneva?"

"Not very much, sir. All I ever had to do to get out of Thonon into Geneva was to show my passports to some frogs I got in touch with, and there's nothing to it."

"Passports?"

"A hundred-franc note, sir. There's a couple of renegade old Frenchmen at Thonon that will run the shore for that. They take you out fishing late of an afternoon in what looks like an old tub. When it gets dark, they purr up the shore, hiding out on the bank every time they hear motors, and moving so slow it takes you all night to hit Geneva. They land you just before daylight four miles out, and you've got to hike in four miles on the shore road. But it was a sure passage, sir."

Rougemont slowed down his motors and eased toward the cluster of faded incandescents that marked Nyon. He brought the craft to a stop at a narrow landing pier, jumped out, trailing a thick rope, and turned a switch that flooded the pier with light, disclosing a stout boathouse built over the water. Returning to the *Filisur*, he nosed her inside. The three disembarked. Rougemont closed the boathouse and turned out the light.

"An hour, only, messieurs," he announced, consulting his watch. "We must slip out of Nyon before the new moon is on the water and cross to the vicinity of Yooire, where we can use the shadows of the French coast to screen us from the eyes of the Boche."

THEY climbed a long flight of steps over the face of the high bank, Rougemont ostentatiously lighting a cigaret as he went. As soon as they reached the top the Frenchman ground the cigaret into the earth with his heel and sat down.

"We will wait here until it is time to go," he announced. "Ah, you can hear no more the motors of the Boche. They have shut down out there in the dark, and their lights are gone, but they will slip on their way when they make sure we are here for the night. Each night for perhaps a month, messieurs, I come only to Nyon, and on the next night, slip into Thonon. The Boche he is very thorough, but also he lack the patience!"

"My telegram, Captain Rougemont, you are certain that it cleared the wires from the post office at Geneva?"

"*Mon Dieu, monsieur!*" Rougemont's voice was vibrant with apology. "It was impossible. From the hour that I leave the Café du Nord on the night poor Jacques send Von Kulm to hell and himself to heaven, the Boche dog my tracks. So I must say, monsieur, with the thousand apologies, that it was impossible."

"No matter," said Elton, covering his bitter disappointment. "But I will have to find some means of getting out of Thonon and into Paris. Is there any way in which I might procure a French automobile? Nothing could be more impor-

tant than for me to reach Paris at once."

"The motor, monsieur, I regret that at Thonon it is impossible. The train from the frontier, it is the only way, and that is very slow and also very difficult, monsieur."

"But, sir," Walters' voice interposed out of the dark, "isn't the Cap'n able to use the plane Colonel Rand is sending over?"

Elton groaned.

"That was what I had counted on, Walters. But by the time Rand could get a plane here, fuel it up and tell the pilot where to land outside Thonon, I might miss out in Paris. No, I'll have to improvise my trip the best way I can, get to the first French military center and steal a general's car if I have to. There's no taking chances."

"Sir, I'm thinking the colonel's got a French plane all set, and a French pilot that knows the lay of the land. When the colonel heard your message, he seemed to know just what you meant by 17-19 and said for me to tell you it was O. K."

"What do you mean, Walters! I thought Sands was killed, that my message lost—lost out."

"Why, no, sir." There was an injured note in Walters' voice. "I thought the Cap'n knew, saw my signal on the table at the Café du Nord. I put it there the minute I got in."

"I didn't quite gather—"

"Yes, sir. Both bottles, to let the Cap'n know something had gone wrong, but I was careful to use only the beer, that told the Cap'n the message was through. That was what made me late, sir. When I saw Sands was gone, I took the message on into headquarters myself."

"I should have known that, Walters!" cried Elton joyously.

"Yes, sir, the Cap'n should," assented Walters.

A soft purring of motors from an unseen boat came indistinctly across the lake. Rougemont hissed for silence and stood straining into the darkness.

"The Boche he slip away," he whispered presently. "Soon we shall be on the way for Yooire, which is a matter of only five kilometers—and then another ten kilometers along the coast of France brings us to the environs of Thonon, messieurs."

After a long wait, Rougemont put a glow from a briquet over the crystal of his wrist watch.

"Ah, but of time there is nothing to spare!" he exclaimed, and led the way back over the face of the bank to the boathouse.

The Frenchman opened the doors and maneuvered the others into the *Filisur* without use of lights. He set his motors to humming lightly, so that the boat crept out and stole softly into the black night. No one spoke. Elton and Walters both checked the loaded clips of their Service pistols. The *Filisur* crept on into the lake, no faster than a man could walk, until a kilometer was past, then Rougemont fed a bit more speed into her heels. Another kilometer skipped behind them. Rougemont stood up, a hand cupped over his ear. He gave a sharp gasp as a low hum, far in the distance, reached his ears, then breathed his relief.

"It is not the motors of Von Kulm," he broke the stillness. "At their slightest whisper am I able to hear them."

But the next moment there was a loud burst of sound close at hand, motors being thrown suddenly in motion. A finger of light cut the darkness and began feeling around like the talon of some mysterious vulture of the night.

"The Boche!" cried Rougemont. "He have set for us the trap!"

He sprang to his engines and fed power into the *Filisur*. The craft fairly leaped ahead, Rougemont changing her course into the direction of Geneva. As soon as he was out of reach of the other's searhlight, he cut off the engines, glided her at another sharp angle and sat down to listen tensely. The finger of light floundered around in the night, the boat racing past them out of range, making a large detour, and finally snapping off her lights and engines to listen.

Rougemont had set his engines to purring again and crept back on his way

toward the French coast. From time to time the German craft moved in short spurts, plying its light, but now well off the scent. Elton wondered that they did not use their speed to comb the lake in every direction, but the reason for their maneuver struck him a few minutes later. A light yellowish glow above the Alpine crest, then an orange flood as the new moon slipped above the jagged skyline.

AT A DISTANCE of five hundred yards they saw the German launch leap into animation and rush toward them through the yellow gloom. Rougemont set the *Filisur* racing at the same instant. The black shadows of France were now visible in the distance, but they no longer offered refuge. Even if the *Filisur* reached Yooire, the place was only a tiny cluster of small huts, set far back from the lake; and if they abandoned the *Filisur* at the shore it would take until daylight to walk on into Thonon.

Slowly the pursuit gained on them. The Germans drove on without lights now, their quarry plainly in sight on the moonlit lake. Rougemont steered on a broad arc to avoid the jagged point where they would pass Yooire, the Germans shifting their course so as to overhaul the *Filisur* from their port side. As both boats gained their full momentum it was evident to Elton that the chase would be brief. The German, a much larger craft than the *Filisur*, seemed fairly to loom out of the lake, as if borne on wings as it swooped down upon its prey.

"*Guardez-vous!*"

The sharp outcry of warning from Rougemont was unnecessary. Elton and Walters were below the gunwale, taking cover instinctively at the first vindictive ping of a Mauser flying wild over their heads. A second shot sang the treble note of a close visitor; a third clouted the thin sides of the wooden cabin.

Elton drew his pistol and glanced at Rougemont.

"*Sacrebleu, monsieurs,* but keep to cover!" the Frenchman warned. "The pistol it but splash the waters!"

But with the range down to a hundred yards, Elton opened fire. Walters fired simultaneously. They emptied their magazines and squatted in the bottom of the boat to reload. Walters was aiming again when there was an ominous burst of sound; he half rose, swore violently and then continued to fire until his magazine was empty.

Another burst of sound, a third and fourth. Bullets pattered against the boat or whistled close overhead. That omen could not be mistaken, the sharp, staccato stab of a machine gun.

"Please, monsieur, to take the helm!" shrieked Rougemont. There was a gloating, joyous note in the Frenchman's outcry, the voice of a man who is fired by the lust of adventure. "Ah, the Boche, he shall now feel vengeance of the *Filisur!*"

As Elton took the helm, motioned low in the boat with Walters, Rougemont threw open a broad wooden trap in the stern and with half a dozen vigorous turns of a metal shaft raised a French one-pounder into sight. When he had shoved a shell into the breech and adjusted the sights, he shouted for Elton to turn sharply to the left and shut off the engines. As Elton did this the pursuit launch swept close to them, broadside, a voice hurtling a strident command to surrender. The Frenchman's gun shook the *Filisur* to the keel with its recoil as a deep throated detonation answered the German challenge. A quick spurt of blue-black water at the bow, and a second one-pounder was on the way. Rougemont's gunnery was faultless—a target on the second shot. He sent in a third as the German craft dipped toward the surface, a sheer miss this time, but the damage was already done. A medley of excited jargon heralded the plunge of the broken craft under the surface of Lake Geneva.

"*Voilà!*" shouted Rougemont in triumph. He waved a mock farewell. "The third of the Von Kulm lake hawk that the *Filisur* have fed to the fishes."

He took the helm back from Elton,

throttled the *Filisur* ahead again and swung round the scene of the wreck.

"To the shores, it is too short a swim, messieurs," he exclaimed. "These are the waters of France, and if there are prisoners we will take them from the water to Thonon."

For some minutes he plied the *Filisur* back and forth, searching every yard of the lake with the boat's searchlight. But except for a few shattered remnants of the German launch, nothing remained afloat.

"*Bien*, it is well enough," shrugged Rougemont, abandoning the search. "The fish will take care of our prisoners! It is *finis*. Into Thonon, messieurs, it is now the beautiful moonlight voyage."

The *Filisur* raced on, Rougemont settling back to watch their course as nonchalantly as though nothing had happened. Elton sat down beside Walters in the cushioned stern seat.

"You can't complain this time, Walters," he said buoyantly, "that you haven't had your share of the adventure."

"No, sir," said Walters.

"The most remarkable thing about a machine gun," Elton speculated, "is the quantity of ammunition it can burn up without hitting any one."

"Yes, sir. But handled right, it sure can spurt a lot of hot lead."

"Thanks to you, Walters, we'll be able to get quick action into Paris. I only hope they send an observation plane, so we can take you along. I can use you down in Paris tomorrow."

"Then it'd be tough to get left behind, sir—and if there's something doing, I'll sure be fit for duty."

Elton turned sharply, caught by a note in Walters' voice.

"Fit for duty?" he repeated anxiously. "What's the matter? Aren't you feeling well tonight?"

"Except for a burning feeling in my shooting arm, I'm feeling O. K, Cap'n," said Walters quietly. "I'm suspecting my arm got in the way of one of those Boche machine gun bullets."

He broke off and pointed eagerly with his left hand.

"But never mind that, sir," Walters exclaimed. "I've been over this lake often enough to know the signs—and that point of land you see sticking out there is just this side of Thonon. We'll be ashore in two more jiffies, Cap'n!"

CHAPTER XXVII

OUT OF THE DAWN

ROUGEMONT put the *Filisur* to a landing in a blind cave a kilometer southwest of the village of Thonon, made her fast to a stout willow thicket and was turning up the bank when Elton halted him.

"My sergeant is wounded," said Elton, "and must have attention before walking a kilometer into the village. Is there a doctor to be had at Thonon?"

"Don't bother now, Cap'n," objected Walters. "Time's too valuable to be thinking about a little thing like one arm. Tomorrow'll be time enough, when I can get a shot of anti-tetanus which'll be all I need to fix me up O. K."

"Sit down while I strip off that sleeve," Elton commanded sternly.

Under the light of a pocket flashlight he examined a messy hole in the non-com's upper right forearm.

"Ah, my felicitations, monsieur," exclaimed Rougemont as he bent over the wound. "The arm, you may not lose him. The gauze which we can get at Thonon will hold the arm together until there is a surgeon at Paris."

"You're sure there's no doctor at Thonon?" Elton asked anxiously.

"But no, monsieur, the surgeons are at the Front with our armies, where there is much need for them—yes, even the surgeons who are too old for service."

"It's all right," Walters spoke up calmly. "A soldier always carries his own private doctor around with him. Here's mine, Cap'n."

He brought from his pocket a small compact tin box, an issue first aid packet, on which Elton broke the metal seal, carefully removed gauze and bandages

and bound the wound expertly. Walters observed the operation indifferently, without wincing.

"Do you feel you can make it into Thonon?" Elton questioned. "If you feel much shock, we can bring some kind of a conveyance out for you, if I have to get it by force."

Walters stood up, a comfortable look on his face.

"I can walk as far as the next one, sir," he said. "We're wasting no good time on that nick. Besides, I always thought I ought to have one, anyhow, so I can sport a wound chevron to set off the rest of my military jewelry. Twenty years' service without a puncture always seemed a bit out of place, sir."

"You can walk between us and we'll keep down the strain by supporting you," Elton proposed. "That's an order, not a request, Walters!"

"Yes, sir, and that's the first order I've ever refused to obey, Cap'n," grinned Walters. "But I refuse to delay the game, and if the Cap'n'll lead out, I'll move along on my own steam."

The Frenchman piloted them up a small winding trail into open country and gave them minute instructions of the way into the village. If they came upon French patrols, the men would be in uniform, he explained. The Americans could readily identify themselves to the French authorities. But if they were stopped by men not in uniform, they were not to be bluffed. Completing these instructions, Rougemont drew himself to salute.

"A great favor, my Captain," he said, "if you will but carry to Monsieur d'Auteuil of our secret service at Paris a message from No. 12. An account of the service of the noble Jacques, and the word that the Count von Kulm he is dead. The trapping of the rats, it will begin within the month, monsieur."

Elton hesitated a moment.

"Yes, of course," he assented. "I will give D'Auteuil a full account of all that has happened, and of your fine service in landing us safely back in France. On my own account I want to say that I am indebted to you everlastingly." He grasped the Frenchman's hand and shook it warmly. "It is not too much to say that all France is indebted to you, Captain Rougemont."

"*Merci, bien, monsieur,*" said Rougemont simply, drawing himself again to salute. "I will return now to Geneva. Tomorrow, Lareaux he will come from Berne with our agents from many parts of Switzerland, and the net of the lake it will bring us many fishes. *Adieu, messieurs!*"

They made their way on into the village, Walters going ahead at a steady, regulation stride, despite Elton's remonstrances. Only a cluster of black shadows told them when they were in the village. A phantom town, it appeared in the moonlight, with no signs of animation. Even the green glow of war lights was absent from the street. As they entered the first rambling street, Walters began clutching at his back with his left arm.

"What's wrong, Walters?" Elton asked quickly. "Sit down if you are in pain."

"Not that, sir," said Walters. "But I find I'm needing a bit of help. If the Cap'n'll please lift my pistol out of my right pocket and put it in my left, where it'll be handy, I'll be obliged."

Elton complied with the request, Walters adjusting the set of the weapon to his own liking in his left hip pocket.

"I'm hoping I'll not need it again tonight, sir," said Walters. "But a gun is so much surplus baggage unless you have it handy."

The sleeping village fretted Elton. A telegraph line into headquarters must carry the final summons for the waiting plane. He saw that he must rouse the village if necessary to find the French operator. After a devious floundering about in dark hallways and a pounding at many doors, they finally located the operator, an old woman who had her own ideas of service. The telegraph opened at eight in the morning. Neither argument nor bribe could shake her out of that decision.

"Sure, if we can bust into the place, I can hammer out the old Morse code myself," proposed Walters, as Elton

abandoned the struggle with the operator.

"That might work if we could get any one awake at the other end," groaned Elton. "But they sleep at nights in this country, just as if the war was something that could wait always on personal convenience."

"Yes, sir, I forgot that—but anyhow we might try."

"A better plan might be to get some one in authority to force that woman out. If she'll keep hammering the French *alerte* over the keys, somebody will wake up and we'll get a wire into headquarters. I'm taking it for granted that the colonel will have some one standing by tonight at headquarters."

"There's no doubt of that, sir."

WITH much inquiry a lot of persuasion and the use of endless French expletives, Elton aroused a gendarme and conveyed to him the importance of putting a message on the wire to American headquarters. The autocrat of the telegraph line yielded finally, at the end of a session of vivid chattering and animated gesticulation, to the power of the French police. The wire was located in her bedroom, and she began tapping out the French *alerte* to awaken the operator at Besançon. Elton's hopes hung in the balance as he listened to the metallic clicks upon which his whole mission now depended. A leap of joy came with the first response, a feeble tap or two that told him Besançon was awake at last.

An hour passed before the subterfuge of an *alerte* had awakened the slumbering line into Chaumont. Then Elton put his code message—the code figure ten—on to the wire and waited for the acknowledgment. When the woman operator finally turned to him and repeated the reply in French, Elton tossed a note of fifty francs to her and left the place.

"Our plane will be in the air in less than five minutes," he exclaimed. "It will land within three hours at a field near Chez Portay—which means we've got eight kilometers to cover. Somebody's going to furnish us with transportation, Walters!"

"Sure, riding beats walking any time," smiled Walters. "But if we have to walk, I can make it through."

The gendarme, by the use of a few blunt words and many emphatic gestures, pointed out the abode of a Frenchman who boasted a horse and cart. But the official declined to use his personal influence further and stalked off in the evident intention of mending the broken thread of his night's sleep. Elton hammered the French owner of horse and cart out of bed, but again his most ardent pleas brought only the inevitable shrugs and stubborn shakes of the head.

"It is for France!" Elton launched a final plea. "The gendarme will confirm that we must go to Chez Portay without delay."

"*Je ne sais pas!*" shrugged the Frenchman with a blank stare. "At seven in the morning, when the horse have had his night's rest and the sun is over the lake, perhaps then, messieurs, I ride you to Chez Portay."

Walters crowded in front of Elton with a quick movement.

"I can't parley French, but I know a language you can understand!" he growled. "Tell him, sir," Walters said to Elton without looking back, "Tell him to come out peacefully with us and hook up that nag."

But the Frenchman needed no further coaxing now. The feel of an automatic in his midriff was indisputable language. Elton hesitated for a moment, then accepted Walters' bluff maneuver. An ancient cob, rawboned and heavy on its feet, was soon harnessed to a rickety two-wheeled farm cart. The three were jolting slowly out of Thonon south and west toward the hamlet of Chez Portay in the upper reaches of the Drance.

"Sure, it's a fine state of things," muttered Walters, "when you have to use a gun to get one of these civilians out of bed long enough to help save France."

At intervals of every kilometer or so Elton caused the Frenchman to stop his conveyance in order to relieve Walters'

arm from the jolting. Two hours' travel landed them at the hamlet, where Elton was able to get his bearings from his previous careful study of the terrain. A return of half a kilometer brought them to a broad open grain field, where Elton restored the Frenchman to good humor with two hundred-franc notes, and released him. From a copse at the edge of the field he got fuel for two small fires, set fifty yards apart, and settled down to wait. A faint humming in the remote distance far overhead brought both to their feet. It was almost as if timed to their arrival at Chez Portay.

"I thought the sing of the telegraph keys at Thonon was sweet music, Elton cried ecstatically, "but the hum of that plane is the sweetest music I've ever heard!"

The plane caught the signal fires, circled low and made a sure landing.

"A two-seated observation plane," shouted Elton, as he led the way to where the plane had taxied into position for a quick getaway. "We'll make him carry us both in one trip."

A French pilot, doubtless selected for his intimate knowledge of the frontier, motioned them into the plane, opened his throttle and raced into the sky. Elton, casting a look behind, saw that the first violet touch of dawn was at the crest of the distant Alps. In a few minutes it would be light. The pilot climbed high and set his course straight to the west. As the deep blues of night thinned, Elton could see the dark greens and myriad somber patterns of sleeping France below. Farm villages, an occasional small city, passed under them. The Frenchman swerved toward Paris at the end of an hour of steady flight. Elton looked at his watch. It was now nearing six o'clock.

He sat back in the crowded seat and made his final calculations. If nothing went wrong, he should be in the outskirts of Paris by eight o'clock. Ample time to set the stage for the final act of his adventure with the German secret service. An exclamation from Walters brought him out of his thoughts. Below them the massed housetops of Paris were glistening in the morning sun.

The plane circled gracefully over the tiny blue ribbon of the Seine, dropped low over Vincennes, and swung to a landing at the American field at Orly.

"Paris!"

It was the Frenchman's only word. He said it with an ingratiating smile, accentuated by a flourishing salute of his hand, as the plane came to a stop on the ground.

Elton helped Walters out of the plane and smiled back at the French pilot.

"Thank you for the ride, monsieur," he exclaimed, and led the way to the aviation headquarters at Orly.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE CHÂTEAU AT VILLEJUIF

THE COMMANDING officer at Orly had orders to give *carte blanche* to a mysterious captain of engineers who would land by plane from an unnamed destination. But the aviation colonel, when he had received his visitor, gasped at Elton's successive demands. The first one was simple enough—a surgeon to look after Walters' arm. Then Elton asked that the colonel surrender his own headquarters building, his two best clerks, place his best car outside headquarters to wait until it was needed, and to have the captain's breakfast served to him at his desk.

"Anything else?" the colonel inquired with a caustic inflection.

"Nothing, sir," said Elton, saluting politely, "except that I am not to be disturbed—and no one is to enter or leave my office except on my orders."

"Very well, your Majesty," said the colonel. "It does sound to me like you're laying it on a bit thick, but orders is orders."

Seated at the nonplused aviation colonel's private desk, Elton busied himself, as he ate his breakfast abstractedly, with the unloading of his memory. He wrote down, one by one, the names of those to whom the German messages in

invisible inks had been addressed, and after each name, the city and street number.

His memory worked smoothly. As he wrote down each name and address, he located the spy's city on a large desk map of Europe and blocked it off in red.

Amiens, M. Emile Viennois, 20 Place St. Denis
Melun, M. Victor Perreaux, 64 Rue du Miroir
Rouen, M. Jules Poissy, 21 Rue du Bec
Chantilly, M. Edouard Quen, 42 Rue d'Aumale
Le Havre, M. Felix Dupuy, 641 Boulevard de Strasbourg

His list of targets filled the page and overflowed on to a second sheet. Forty-seven German agents, in all, divided into two classes; those operating in Allied territory, who could be captured and shot; those working in neutral capitals who could be turned over to neutral authorities for violation of neutrality and internment. The list of spies in France were those of key men, in charge of districts, and their loss in each case would be a blow which only the genius of a Von Kulm might overcome. In addition to the key man, there was the rendezvous near Paris of fifteen Russians recruited for a reign of destruction among French munition factories.

Elton's list, when he had completed it, resembled a roster of world centers; London, Edinburgh, Dublin, Copenhagen, Christiania, Brussels, Madrid, Lisbon, Rome, Cairo, Buenos Aires, Mexico City, Washington, New York, Tokyo, Hongkong, Bombay, Peking. His red dots on the maps linked in green lines, strangely suggested the great spy net that was about to be drawn from the international waters filled with wary fish.

With the spy roster complete, he next devised a simple cipher message, one that would cover all cases in France. For this he set down the key agreed upon with Colonel Rand before he went to Switzerland, and in which the waiting operatives in every affected city had been thoroughly coached. His key, a transposition cipher in which every letter had full value, was a division of the alphabet into two parallel lines, with the key word N E T set in on the second line.

A B C D Q F G H I J K L M
P O N *E* *T* S R U V W X Y Z

In this cipher each letter was the symbol for the letter immediately above or below it, A meaning P and P meaning A, B representing O and O pointing back to B. A uniform message of from ten to a dozen words, depending on the length of the street number, worked out to his purpose and he set the first one down rapidly by consulting the key:

F D V M D W H Y D F A B V F F L
Q J D C Q L B C D G H D
E H O D N D F A V B C P R D—G P C E

Delivered to the waiting American operative at Rouen, that officer would need only to jot down his simple cipher key from memory and in a few moments, unscramble the word jumble into the following coherent instructions:

SEIZE JULES POISSY TWENTY ONE RUE DU BEC
ESPIONAGE—RAND

With his work sheets ready, Elton admitted the two clerks, instructed them that they were not to leave the room, even for their meals, until midnight, and set them to work enciphering the terse messages that were to be flashed throughout France, while he devised the more complicated messages to capitals outside France. A third message for dispatch to American embassies and legations in neutral countries followed, after which Elton got the purchasing office on the military telephone and, using the authority of Colonel Rand's name, directed that Corporal Smedley report at once to the headquarters of the aviation center at Orly.

An hour later a stockily built man in his early twenties entered the room, snapped to attention and announced his presence.

"Corporal Smedley reports, sir!"

Elton shook himself out of the detailed maps of the region adjoining Paris on the south and jumped to his feet with extended hand.

"Glad to see you, Captain," he exclaimed. "You sure look a lot more like a

soldier in that corporal's uniform than you do in your Sam Browne and trappings. How do you like being a corporal?"

Captain Smedley relaxed his stiff pose and took Elton's hand, a warm glow in his level blue eyes.

"It's fine enough, Elton." He smiled. "But when I get back under my bars, there's a couple of Q. M. sergeants that I'm going to pay a social call on. Also some second lieutenants. They've made life miserable for me since you had Rand put me on this job."

"Well, what's the situation?"

"Excellent, thank you."

"Farnham?"

"He's taking a three-day pass, Elton." Captain Smedley gave Elton a sly look. "Went down to visit some dear friends at a place called Villejuif. Heard of it?"

"I was just verifying the place and looking up the road when you came," said Elton, pointing to his map on the desk beside him. "Any unusual obstacles to be overcome in getting in there?"

"Not that I know of, Elton. I think Farnham's Swiss friends are depending on their incog, but I imagine the place has plenty of fast exits, and I happen to know there is a large plane with French markings camouflaged in a field just west of the château."

Elton smiled understandingly.

"Thanks for that bit of information, Smedley. It rather clears up another Hun puzzle that has been bothering me. I can see now why the German spymaster prefers to take his chances at a hidden château, with his plane handy, rather than trust his neck in Von Strindheim's underground headquarters in the heart of Paris. By the way, did Farnham's mail come regularly from Geneva?"

"You're a very faithful correspondent, Elton, I'd say."

"You managed to develop the invisible inks on some of the letters?"

"Only three or four. Farnham didn't give me much of a chance at them. He watched those letters from Switzerland like they were gold. But I got the whole hang of the party at Villejuif, and can take you to the château itself when you're ready."

ELTON rose to pace the floor, swinging his arms energetically.

"It's certainly great to be here where I can work without stifling in a clothes closet," he exclaimed. "I've had some close rubs, Smedley, and simply ate German crow as a daily diet, but it looks as if tonight was the night of reckoning for all that if we haven't made some serious miscalculation."

"I surely hope we haven't, Elton," said Smedley thoughtfully. "Of course I've only got a limited peek at the picture, from behind Farnham's shoulder, so to speak, but things look good to me. Looking for a pretty good haul, are you?"

Elton indicated the adjoining room where the typists were ticking away at their messages.

"Just getting ready to haul in the nets, Smedley. I'm sure of a lot of small fish—but what I'm hoping for above all else is the father of the whole tribe. But here, we can't spend the whole day gossiping. You help me a bit with this map, then get back to Farnham's desk and stay there until the shop closes. Then report back here by, say six o'clock, ready for business."

They worked out together the road net approaching the château at Villejuif and decided upon an inconspicuous converging movement of American Military Police. Seven men were to go to Sceaux and work in scattered formation northeast on Villejuif. Another detachment was to walk across from the depot at Vitry, while a third party of four approached from Choisy le Roi. Elton, with Smedley and a selected party in a light supply truck, was to proceed directly south from the gates of Paris to the village, then walk to the château which stood two hundred and fifty meters south of the crossroads at Villejuif. By eight o'clock all were to converge swiftly on the château for the final test of wits with Von Kulm's secret field marshals.

Officers came and went during the afternoon as this detail and that was adjusted; trusted officers of the American forces in Paris. A seal of absolute silence was placed on all who were given a part, but each officer whom Elton summoned learned only his own immediate rôle, with no inkling of the larger meaning of it all. When, late in the afternoon, the last peg was in place, he called Colonel Rand on the military long distance.

"No. 7 reporting all set, sir," he said nonchalantly.

"That's the best news I've heard yet," said Rand cheerfully. "I mean the sound of your voice. What are the prospects?"

"Excellent, sir."

"There's to be a job for all those operatives I've sent gallivanting over France?"

"Yes, sir, and I have a few additions, sir, if you can rush men out immediately."

Rand wrote the names and addresses down personally, as Elton gave them to him a letter at a time in cipher.

"I'll shoot men out by motorcycle sidecar instantly, Elton. By the way, I don't know what this means to you, but I have a tip over the private wire from Paris today that one Von Kulm is dead."

"Where'd you hear that, sir?"

"Lieutenant d'Auteuil, French Second Section. He didn't give me any other details, but said he had it from Geneva and was very happy."

"Was there anything further, sir?"

There was a brief silence. Elton thought he could see the colonel engrossed in his favorite thought provoking habit of rubbing his long red nose with a bony finger.

"No, except that if the Boche hasn't hoaxed you, Elton, it'll be the biggest thing we ever put over."

"Thank you, sir," said Elton, and unceremoniously hung up.

At six o'clock Elton closed the office upon two puzzled military typists who were left confined therein, stretched himself and smiled gratefully into the invigorating tang of a September breeze. The stir of the air seemed to stimulate him with a sense of freedom, freedom from an atmosphere tainted with intrigue, freedom from the tense restraints of the past few weeks, freedom from the exacting details that had claimed his every minute today.

As he stepped into an awaiting light truck, covered and equipped with side seats, there was the thrill of adventure in his veins, a stirring of his blood that wiped out any thought that he had been without sleep, under a constant strain, for two days. Walters, his right arm suspended from his shoulder in splints, was waiting calmly, a glint in his eye. Captain Smedley and two capable appearing sergeants of infantry, wearing sidearms, completed Elton's immediate party.

They drove into Paris and threaded their way by a devious route about the city until darkness had settled, then proceeded by a rambling southerly route to Sceaux, thence east and north to Villejuif, approaching from the south. At the dot of eight they were at the château, the Mecca of Elton's best laid plans. With the others close behind, Elton walked swiftly and silently through the grounds until arrested by a high metal grille that barred the final approach to the château.

A shadow spoke to him from behind the iron barrier, a single irritated note of query.

"Messieurs?"

"Friends of his Excellency," said Elton. "We were to report here at eight."

The man stepped close to the grille and as he did so Elton thrust a pistol against him.

"The slighest move and I'll shoot you!" he said through set teeth. He pushed the fellow roughly back with the muzzle of his pistol. "Or if you touch that alarm buzzer! I'll open the gate myself."

He gave the pistol to Smedley while he reached through the grille and turned the lock of the gate. Smedley, as soon as they passed inside, released the trembling outguard to one of the sergeants, and followed close at Elton's heels. A butler in livery answered the door, but was left speechless with mouth wide open at the quick thrust of a muzzle in his stomach. Elton shoved him aside and strode into

the reception hall, through several living rooms and into the dining room, guided by the chatter of diners.

At first sight of Elton the alarm passed through the dining room with the unfathomable speed of an electric current. Half a dozen startled men in civilian evening clothes were on their feet in various poses of momentary indecision. Elton leaped into the breech.

"Please, gentlemen, I advise against any show of firearms!" his voice crackled. "We are here in heavy force—your place is fully surrounded, and there's nothing you can do but contain yourselves!"

As if in emphasis of Elton's words, the seven infantrymen from Choissy le Roi poured into the château at the instant and were motioned to the dining hall by Smedley.

ELTON'S eyes swept the room. At the head of the table sat the Count von Kulm he had seen at the château on Lake Geneva that last day. The man's face was stolid and set, but without fear, the mask of a soldier who gambles easily with Fate. At his right was Herr Sirwolten, leaning back in his chair, arms folded, his large gray eyes set upon Elton quizzically. Next sat Mademoiselle Le Rivet, her eyes stark with terror, then Farnham staring straight ahead of him, Za the color of marble and with chattering teeth. The others of Herr Sirwolten's tribunal who had sentenced him to death completed the picture, in the same stolid humor that possessed Von Kulm.

Herr Sirwolten rose with a calculated deliberation.

"The insane fellow who annoyed his Excellency at Geneva appears to have broken into France," he said in a level, authoritative voice. He addressed Captain Smedley. "Has this mad fellow misled you Americans into this outrage? If so, you will do well to avoid getting yourselves any deeper into this muddle. I intend to exact full satisfaction from the American generalissimo for this annoyance."

"I'm in command here," said Elton. "You will address your remarks to me. My purpose here is to arrest Von Kulm and all his agents in this room for espionage. The count will leave the room first."

Herr Sirwolten turned a grave face to the head of the table.

"Your Excellency," he addressed the stone faced man at the head of the table, "this fellow Elton suffers violent hallucinations. But be assured we will find a speedy way out of this annoyance."

"Von Kulm, I told you you were to leave the room first!" commanded Elton. "Now don't try to equivocate with that poor military dummy who masquerades under your name for your own protection."

Herr Sirwolten, at Elton's accusation, did not betray himself by the slightest token. He turned with an easy smile to Farnharm, who sat in full uniform, a mere dumb spectator.

"My dear Captain Farnham," he exclaimed, "will you please explain to these misguided countrymen of yours that the man is mad?" He turned to Smedley. "Why, Captain Farnham can vouch for me, for all my guests! For years we have been warm friends, and I know how tremendously embarrassing all this must be to Captain Farnham, messieurs."

"How long have you known Captain Farnham, your Excellency, and how well?" Elton broke in.

"Indefinitely," replied Sirwolten, with just the hint of a man who grasps at a straw. "A long time—years. I feel that I know him most intimately, indeed, messiers."

"Then I fear, my dear Count," said Elton caustically, "that the sly rascal has been deceiving you shamelessly. Stand up, Farnham! I want Von Kulm to meet my most valuable and trusted fellow operative in the American Secret Service, Captain Edward Farnham who came all the way from America to help arrange this little party we're having tonight—in your honor, my dear Count von Kulm."

Von Kulm, alias Herr Sirwolten, reddened and bit his lips. A tremendous blow that had shaken his inordinate van-

ity rather than his fears. Farnham bowed to Elton and looked about the table, his face wreathed in a suave smile.

"Thank you, Captain Elton, for clearing up that point," he said. "It has been most embarrassing at times playing the American dunce for the imperial German secret service."

"A slight miscalculation, as I have always contended," mused Von Kulm, calmly, addressing his gloomy staff with a note of reproach that placed the blame on their shoulders, "is apt to prove a serious matter." He faced Elton again with a smile. "But the things you have charged, Captain Elton, they remain to be proven."

"But please remember, Count Kulm, you will not have the benefit of the pleasing little tribunal that heard my case in Switzerland. As for your miscalculation, I will be glad to tell you this; that I fear you are incapable of ever understanding the little miscalculation that is chiefly responsible. Otherwise you might not have so many unpleasant guests at your secret château tonight."

He broke off speaking, motioned the prisoners into the custody of the military detachment that now filled the room, and left, beckoning Farnham to follow. They entered a military touring car that had driven up to wait for Elton, and sped off to Paris. Both rode for some time without speaking, busy with their own thoughts.

"Three sheafs of cipher telegrams will be singing all over the face of the world in a few minutes, Farnham," Elton mused as they sped into Paris. "The greatest spy roundup in history, no doubt. It's even bigger than anything we imagined when you came off the boat at Bordeaux."

"I'm grateful to you, Elton, for getting me overseas and giving me this chance at big game," said Farnham enthusiastically. "It's been ticklish business at times, but I was sure you'd get here before Von Kulm set his wheels in motion tomorrow."

"Tomorrow!" said Elton, looking at Farnham with quick interest. "So tomorrow was the Von Kulm D day?"

"Yes, tomorrow. And frankly, Elton, those German plans worried me. The badgering of important statesmen in many countries to a discreet doing of the German bidding looked dangerous. Von Kulm certainly had collected some fast entries in his Black Book, and I've no doubt that a lot of big men would have been compelled to do as he commanded. But worse than that was his flood of Russian Czarist mercenaries who were to dynamite munition plants, docks and supply centers; and his breeders of revolutions in the Allied colonies. In a word, Elton, he was laying down a reign of mischief that would have encircled the globe!"

"But, thanks to a few miscalculations," said Elton, "our net will put a final end to all that in a few more hours, Farnham."

They lapsed into thoughtful silence again as the car sped on into Paris and threaded its way under the green war lights towards American headquarters.

"I've been wondering, Elton," Farnham spoke up presently, "just what you meant when you told Von Kulm what you did about his principal miscalculation."

"Just this, Farnham; that with all his genius for intrigue, for dwarfing poor weak human nature to his own ends, he couldn't quite, not even with a war going on, poison the heart of a really good woman."

Farnham tapped the side of the car reflectively with his riding crop.

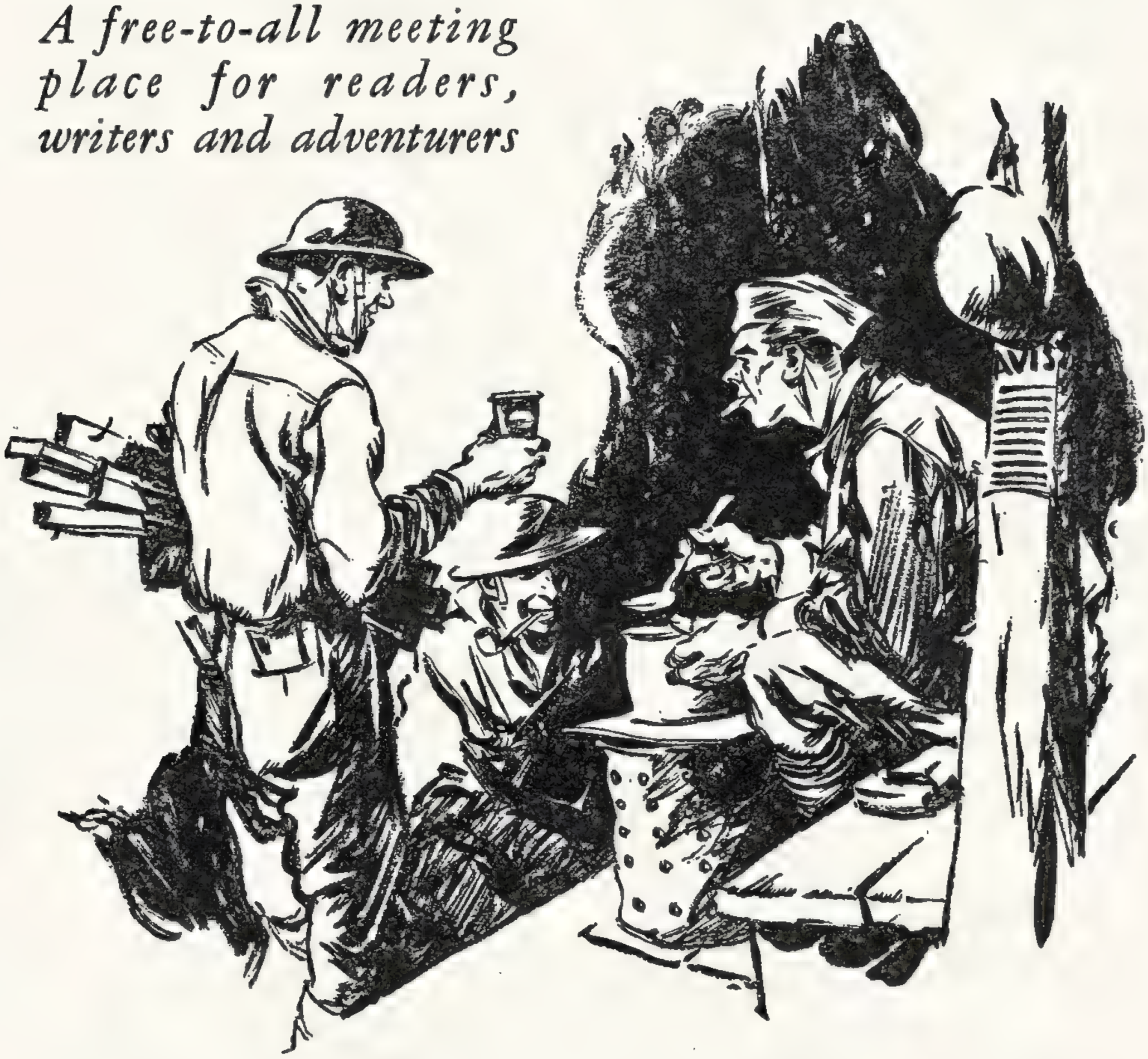
"I was sorry, Elton," he said feelingly, "to see you include Mademoiselle Le Rivet in your order of arrest. It may sound strange to you, but I can't seem to feel it's just right for her to face a French firing squad, even though that's the law."

"You're right, Farnham," Elton agreed. "My word to Rand and D'Auteuil will be all that is necessary," said Elton. "But I'll be busy with a lot of other things tomorrow—and when I get the release order, you might carry it over to Vincennes to see that it's carried out. Somehow, Farnham, I've got a notion you'd rather like that job."

THE END

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers



A NOTE by Sidney Herschel Small in connection with his story, "The Wheel of Life", in this issue:

San Rafael, Cal.

The method used in the story regarding the choice of a Dalai Lama—the absolute Tibetan ruler—may sound like fiction, but it isn't. The present Dalai Lama is said to have three of the five sacred signs, and "an unearthly light issues from his countenance" which makes it impossible for his ministers to look him in the face.

The placing of the names of presumptive rulers in a receptacle, from which the lucky name is drawn, is not fictional either. The Chinese, in 1793, presented Lhasa with a golden urn, which was used for a hundred years or so, until the Tibetans discovered that the ballot box was being stuffed and that the Chinese candidate was always chosen.

NOR is the excitement of the British *Raj* over the selection of a candidate something without fact. Situated as it is, Tibet acted as a buffer between India and Russia in the old days, and as the same thing between the Empire and the red influences today. The Tibetan ruler's sway is absolute Really unrivaled. He is backed by the veneration of a superstitious people who regard him as a Divinity on earth, and there can be no opposition to his

orders. "No medicine for death, no answer to His Holiness's order" is a Tibetan saying.

The politics played in finding a Dalai Lama, after the death of a former one, can be well imagined. Sometimes very strange results occur: The ruling clique proclaimed that the wife of one of their number would give birth to the boy destined as the reincarnation, which would naturally keep the control where they wanted it. Only, after much ringing of bells and striking of gongs and beating of drums, the babe turned out to be a girl.

—SIDNEY HERSCHEL SMALL

GORDON MACCREAGH offers us some information on the question we put to old Africanders at one of our recent meetings.

Huntington Beach, L. I.

Here is one of the coupla hundred replies you will doubtless get to the "must" elephant query.

The word is really *musth*, a Sanskrit word meaning lustful, or sex crazy. It has been taken into Urdu and thence into Hindustani, from which it has been Anglicized into must.

It is applied by their mahouts to elephants in captivity when they, the males only, exhibit signs of sex urge during the breeding season. The symptoms are nervousness, irritability, loss of appetite, and an ill-smelling discharge from the pits between eye and ear.

By no means do all male elephants go *musth*. Some never do. Some exhibit the symptoms every season. An alert mahout can always detect the signs before any damage is done. Upon noting the signs, precautions to be taken are, naturally, to see that the animal is very securely chained to its stake by the hind leg, to avoid exciting it, to keep clear, and to feed it various herbs which are supposed to be cooling and soothing.

Native mahouts have a weird list of things which are supposed to be efficacious; amongst them are chirretta twigs, saltpetre, and opium.

I don't know what veterinary practise has to say for or against any of these. I do know that, working a gang of teak elephants, I had an old chief mahout who talked the elephant language, who used to tell the lusty young males that women were no good anyway, and who would give them balls of opium as big as his fist wrapped up in rice flapjacks. The trouble symptoms would pass off in a couple of weeks, and the animal could then be worked again with perfect safety.

The main trouble with *musth* is that frequently a commercial concern, hating to lose a couple of weeks' work out of a beast that cost as much as fifty men to keep, hopes to continue work with an animal whose symptoms are not very pronounced; and then, something happens to irritate the beast and he goes right off the handle. And, having gone, it is up to his immense dignity to smash things up all around just to work off his temper.

Mahouts say that wild elephants never go *musth*, for the reason that they are not forcibly kept in unnatural sex conditions.

They are awfully human things, are elephants.

It would be right interesting to hear from someone who has had experience with the African elephants that the Belgian government has trained to work in the Congo country.

—GORDON MACCREAGH

A WESTERN reader enlightens us a bit on the subject of soogans, tarps and bedrolls.

Phoenix, Ariz.

About soogans: In Wyoming and Montana a soogan is a cheap cotton quilt such as cowpunchers and sheepherders buy. The bedroll was never carried behind a saddle in the north. They weigh from 30 to 50 pounds and make a roll from 18 to 24 inches in diameter and were either carried on the chuck wagon for punchers or on the supply wagon for sheepherders, or on a pack horse for either one.

A tarp is wide enough to fold clear around a full sized bed and snap, and long enough so the bottom part can be drawn up over the bed and tucked in under at the sides and cover clean over the head of the bed in case of rain or snow, making the bed weatherproof and windproof.

A PERSON who knows how to make up a bed with a tarp can carry it for days in wet or snowy weather without getting it wet. Most of the modern punchers and herders use the little square teepee. Nearly all sheepherding is done from the sheep wagon, which is a very comfortable house on wheels and can be taken any place.

No weight more than a slicker or coat can be carried behind a saddle for any distance without giving the horse a sore back. Which is a mighty bad thing for horse and rider. If a man gets caught out without his bed he does the best he can with his saddle blanket. But if he knew he was going to be out in the worst of weather and only had one horse, he would not carry a bed on his horse farther than he wanted to walk and lead the horse.

—D. J. WOODRUFF

I ASKED Allan Vaughan Elston, in connection with his novelette "Mystery Ship" in this issue, just what were the chances of a man's regaining his ship without aid, after falling overboard. According to the author, it doesn't seem to be such an improbable feat, especially on a heavily loaded freighter, as was the vessel in the story. Mr. Elston's reply:

Hollywood, Cal.

This was a Three-Island type freighter loaded to the scuppers. Certainly a man could not reboard a passenger liner, but this case is quite different. Our man was not heaved out ten feet, or even five feet, from the wall of the ship. He dropped from a handhold on a porthole, which would put him in the water squarely against the side of the ship. As the ship moved on, its riveted wall was grazing him every instant. He was snatching futilely at those rivets. They afforded him no grip, but he might reasonably be expected to grab the first sharp edge which came his way.

Consider the speed of the ship. I gave the maximum speed as ten knots, which would make the average speed 8 or 9. That is about 13 feet per second. When he came abreast the rear part of the after-deck, the ship would have moved about 130 feet, which means that ten seconds of time would have passed from his original plunge.

HE then had three possibilities of a hand hold, mentioned twice in the story, the after-deck rail, a scupper vent, or the log line which trails aport for dead reckoning. Once he grabbed anything, he could easily get aboard. I'm sure I could do it myself.

All through this story I kept in mind my own ship, on which I took a long tedious voyage in 1915. It was so heavily loaded that I could lean over the after-deck rail and trail my hand in the water. Once on a tropical night we put torches on the low decks. We picked up flying fish *by the tubful*, which lit on deck, lured by those torches. You know that a flying fish does not clear the water very much, and thus you can imagine the deepness of our hatch decks.

Incidentally an hour ago I looked in the Encyclopedia Britannica to see if it gave an average dimension for any of the famous diamonds. It did not. But, oddly, I found this statement: "The Orloff, 186 carats, stolen by a French soldier from the eye of an idol in a Brahmin temple, stolen again from him by a ship's captain——"

There was my plot all the while, and I didn't know it. —ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON

ANOTHER letter from a comrade who played rugby with the Marines in China:

Houlton, Oregon

I read with interest in the June fifteenth issue an account of the Marines' rugby activities in China by Lieutenant Baylis of the 4th Regiment.

I was a member of the 12th Regiment in Tientsin in 1927 when the call first went out for rugby players. About thirty of us turned out that first day, a goodly number being from the second battalion of the 12th, that goldbricking West Coast outfit, who decided that it would be better than drilling out at Belgian Field, whatever it was. None of us knew one thing about the game.

However, when they showed us a football almost like the one we had played with at home, we didn't feel so lost, and the way the boys went after it would inspire another Star Spangled Banner. There were several Quantico and San Diego football stars on the team, and they introduced a brand of tackling and open field running that the English had never seen before. The spiral pass was something new to them, too, and we got away with murder until they learned that it wasn't impossible to toss a football fifty yards.

Sometimes in the heat of the game the boys would forget they were playing rugby and start playing good old American football, and many were the humorous mistakes before the unfamiliar rules were mastered.

Lieutenant Baylis makes one mistake in his letter: it was the East Yorkshires, and not the Welsh Regiment, who were our first instructors. They taught us the game, and then on Thanksgiving Day we reciprocated by giving them a beating before a big crowd. I guess maybe it wasn't cricket; they were good sports but they stayed pretty close to home for a few days after that, because they were supposed to be pretty good.

—J. H. JENNINGS

GEORGE S. MYERS, who covers the Ichthyology section for "Ask Adventure," wants some information in his own line.

Stanford University, Cal.

For some ten years I have been a more or less regular, but silent, listener at the Camp-Fire, though of late I have met a number of you through the "Ask Adventure" route. Fish in general are my speciality, but some interest me more than others First and foremost among these are the blind fishes of underground waters and all of the finny tribe that swim in the mighty rivers of South America. It is about these that I want to talk.

Several years ago, perhaps about 1924, one of the Camp-Fire Circle told about digging through the dry bed of a stream, somewhere in the Southwest, and finding water out of which he got "blind trout." As I remember it, he said they were white and had no eyes. I lost the reference and don't remember his name or where he said he got the fish. I'd like to find out.

BLIND fish are queer creatures. It is thought that through the ages fishes that got into caves and underground rivers lost their eyes and their color because they had no use for either. In whatever way it came about, the fact remains that such fish exist, and nearly all are colorless (white), and either have lost or are on the road to losing their eyes. Most of the different kinds have never gotten out of their original home and so are found in but

one cave or stream or in a few connecting ones. The best known blind fishes are the three kinds found in the Mammoth Cave, and in fact in all of the connecting underground waterways of the limestone region of Southern Indiana, Kentucky, and down into Missouri.

Nearly all the others now known have been found only in a single cave and hence nearly every one reported from a new locality is found to be a species entirely new to science. The farthest west locality known for blind fishes in this country is an artesian well in San Antonio, Texas; and if blind fishes are found farther west, they are doubtless entirely unknown species. This is what makes me interested in the old Camp-Fire record.

OTHER blind fishes have unexpectedly popped up in several parts of the world, nearly all discovered rather recently. Here's a list of the places, other than those above mentioned: cave streams tributary to the Conestoga River, Eastern Pennsylvania; Cave of Thysville, Lower Congo; El Uegit, Bud-Bud, and Puits d'Eil, all in Italian Somaliland, and a different fish at each of the three places; Taleh Pool, Old Nogal, British Somaliland; caves in the region between Alacranes and Cañas, Southern Cuba—two kinds here; Guacharo Cave, Trinidad; cisterns in the interior of the Island of Marajo, at the mouth of the Amazon; and Cavernas das Areiras, Iporanga, São Paulo, Brazil. The blind fishes reported in the newspapers not long ago from underground streams in the Sahara proved to be ordinary fishes recently washed in from surface pools.

Perhaps some of you wanderers have seen or heard of blind fishes in still other places. If so they are probably unknown and I'd be glad to hear about them. Reports have come to me about some in the cave stream at Phantom Lake, east of the Davis Mts. in Texas, and in Devil's Hole, Amargosa Desert, Nevada. I have been to both places and found none, but the time may not have been right. Besides the blind fishes there are in some caves blind salamanders (water lizards), notably in Missouri and in artesian wells in Central Texas, and these are as interesting as the fishes.

THEN to come to the river fishes of South America. There are many of them, more different kinds than in any other continent. I know some of you have had experiences with the bloodthirsty *piranhas*, the ponderous *pirarucú*, the *sorubim*, and others—perhaps even know tales of the *candirú*, —and I'd like to hear them. So far Fate has not been kind enough to let me go down there and I've had to confine myself to contemplation of rows of pickled specimens in jars and a few swimming in an aqua ium, brought back by those more fortunate. I know most of them at sight, however, can even rattle off whether it is a *Pterygoplichthys multiradiatus* or a *Salminus maxillosus*—and make a good guess whether it was caught in the Apuré or the Jurua or the Beni, but of closer acquaintance I have none.

What I am especially looking for is some one who has tried civilized sporting methods on South American fresh-water fishes, and what his results were. I know the native methods are usually the bow and arrow or *cubé* poison, but any real angling knowledge of South America is few and far between. I know the gameness of the *dorado* of the Alto Paraná has caused the formation of the Dorado Club in Buenos Aires, but there are *dorados* or close relatives in most South American rivers, and I am looking for somebody who has fished for them or others. Perhaps no one has—who knows? Some day, not long hence, I'll pull up stakes and head south, but in the meantime who of you has dropped a trout fly on the black waters of an *igarapé* along the Río Negro, or has had his plug vanish in the maw of an unknown monster of the Marañon, or even who has dropped a bent pin into the waters of *any* South American river, and *where*, and *what* did you catch? The above address will reach me. —GEORGE S. MYERS

HERO or villain? A reader takes exception to Edgar Young's estimate of Lopez, Tyrant of Paraguay.

Wilmington, Delaware

When MacCreagh recently defended slavery in Ethiopia, I restrained myself with some difficulty from annoying the members of the Camp-Fire with a letter on a few basic economic facts. I find, however, after reading Mr. Young's recent attempt (in his article "Lopez at Pikysiry") to make a hero of Lopez the Incompetent, Lopez the Destroyer of a Race, that I must protest or burn up. I imagine that Mr. Young's article was based on hearsay several generations late, because I can not fancy him pointing his article as he did with a knowledge of the facts in the case. These facts are, very briefly, as follows:

Francisco Solano Lopez was the son of Carlos Antonio Lopez, First Consul of Paraguay. During his father's consulship he was special envoy of his father in Europe and in 1853 or 1854 contracted for large quantities of war materials, possibly (if Mr. Young's opinion of him be correct) with the object of starting a museum. However that may be, when his father died in 1862 he assumed the reins of government and approximately a year later interfered in a quarrel between Brazil and Uruguay. In 1865 he declared war against Brazil and Argentina.

NOW please take out your atlases and look at the map of South America. To even an amateur strategist, Lopez's idea is clear. Two great rivers form almost a natural rectangle fronting on the sea. It would appear, consequently, that Lopez's first idea was to make an alliance with Uruguay with the eventual object of dominating that vast rectangle of land, possibly with the further object of later extending his dominions.

However, regardless of what his dreams of am-

bition may or may not have been, his plans began to miscarry at once, for Uruguay united with Brazil and Argentina (doubtless fearing his friendship more than their enmity) and efficiency began to teach Lopez the art of war. That war lasted five years, and Lopez was beaten at every point, despite the fact that Paraguay is almost a natural fortress. Had he had even ordinary ability no invasion of Paraguay could have penetrated for fifty miles. Had he had even common sense he never would have begun his career as a South American Alexander by attacking simultaneously South America's two most powerful countries.

THE comparison of Lopez to Alexander is not inapt, at least so far as Philip and Lopez senior went, because each began by making himself supreme in his own country, leaving it to his son to extend his dominions. At that time Paraguay was not the insignificant country that it has been since Lopez's day but was comparatively powerful in man power, money, and material. The populace, as pointed out by Mr. Young, was trained in implicit obedience. All he needed for a successful defense was a trace of ability in himself. All he needed to become a South American Alexander was a trace of genius, lacking both of which he could not but fail.

His poverty of intellect is possibly best illustrated by the example which Mr. Young gives of making the last stand with the remnants of Paraguaian men in a position which could be swept by the cannon of the allied fleet.

ONE year of war should have taught him that he could not win, yet rather than yield up the family loot, Lopez chose to treat it (the people of Paraguay) like a chattel that belonged to him, and over which he had the right of destruction. He destroyed the men of Paraguay rather than suffer effacement himself. This is not surprising; indeed it would have been surprising had he done otherwise. His breed is not new to the world. History is full of them, and from Alcibiades to Cromwell, from Cromwell to Lopez, not a tyrant has lived who would not sell his nation, who would not wade knee-deep in the blood of men, if by so doing he could add one more boast to his grandeur.

The history of Paraguay is short, in fact so short that it can be entirely given in three phrases: The Society of Jesus built it; Carlos Antonio Lopez stole it; and Francisco Solano Lopez destroyed it.

History such as this makes one doubt the efficiency of any punishment; because: What penance could one man do in a limitless eternity of Hell to make up for his wrong to the people of Paraguay, and to the children who never were born because of him?

—JOHN L. SEYMOUR

SEVERAL letters have come in, all of which, except one, seem to concede as little authenticity to our friend, the tailed man of Borneo, as to P. T. Barnum's stuffed mermaids. The lone exception, from Aleko E. Lilius; of "Ask Adventure," states that he's never heard of this freak in Borneo, but he encloses two striking photographs of a Bontoc, a wild tribesman of the northern Philippines, who sports a very convincing tail. Here is a communication from one of the nay-sayers:

Havana, Cuba

In the July 1st issue is a letter from Duke W. Fowler, referring to another letter from A. Foehl, Jr., about the "tailed men" of Borneo or the Philippines. I have put in fifteen years in the Philippines and Borneo, and am ready to come out flat footed with the statement that such a freak does not exist. If some competent observer comes forward to say that he, personally, has seen such a thing, I'll believe it.

Tales of tails were very common among the soldiers who served in the Islands in the early days. I have talked with many of them about the phenomenon, but nobody had actually seen one. It was always a case of a story passed from one to another, growing as it went.

Before the law prohibiting such things was passed, one could buy, in Manila, a wonderful photo of an Igorrot with a tail. The only flaw was that the tail had been made and put on as a joke. But the film turned out so well that a photographer, sensing its commercial possibilities, bought it and put prints on sale.

I BELIEVE that a doctor will tell you that we all have tails when in embryo. These are absorbed before birth. A ship's doctor once called my attention to a slight protuberance at the base of the spine of a sailor he was examining for enlistment. He thought it was a case of incomplete absorption. I had an accurate description of a similar case, which the informer stated showed a hard protuberance about two inches long. If one cares to look up exhaustively the records of physical examinations in the draft for the World War, or reports of similar examinations from countries having universal military service, I believe you will find similar incidences. I have investigated numerous reports of natural freaks, and have always found them, to say the least, greatly exaggerated. There are competent students of physiology in the Philippines and Borneo, who would long since have written monographs on the subject if there were such a thing.

—S. DAVIS WINSHIP

Ask *Adventure*

For free information and services you can't get elsewhere

Wild Horses

CAPTURING them, out in the Big Horn and Haystack hills, is one of the most thrilling sports in the world, though the chance of catching a really good mount is slight.

Request:—"I should very much appreciate it if you would give me details on the subject of catching wild horses on the Western ranges. You mentioned the subject in your letter to me, and I should like to know how to go about it."

—JOSEPH GUGGOLZ, New York City

Reply, by Mr. Frank Earnest:—Wild horses range in Wyoming in the Haystack Mountains located in Carbon County, some thirty miles East of Rawlins, also, in the Bad Lands in Big Horn County, Wyoming. It would be necessary for a person not familiar with the country to employ some one who was familiar with it. The equipment necessary would be a camp outfit comprising tent, cooking utensils, etc., a string of about ten grain fed rope horses, a good supply of grain and grub, and also about fifty two-inch nuts (iron), or horseshoes will do.

After locating your camp you will of necessity have to spend a few days in becoming familiar with the terrain and you will find that there are trails through the country which the wild horses employ in going to and from water. There are several methods of capturing wild horses but the best method for two men is to relay and tire out the wild horses to the extent that you can ride right among them and rope them. This is done by one of the men chasing the horses until his mount becomes tired out then his partner takes them for another whirl while the first man gets a change of horses and is ready to take up the chase when his partner's horse becomes tired.

You continue to keep after these horses until they are so fatigued that you can ride in among them, pick out the best ones and rope them. Both men should be in at this. When you rope one he will choke himself down, then one of you must hold him down or if you are alone you can hog-tie him and then tie one of these two inch nuts or horseshoes, whichever you are using, in his foretop. You can then turn him loose with the assurance that he isn't going to do very much running and will be easy to handle.

You keep right on catching as many as possible in this manner. After you have caught all you can or want you will have to work them into a bunch together. You will find that it takes a couple of days and a lot of darn hard riding before you can tire these horses sufficiently to ride up among them. The best time of the year for this purpose is in the Spring of the year when the grass commences to get green as they gorge themselves on the green grass and it physics them until they are in a weakened condition.

After you have got your bunch of horses together you will have to corral them part of the time and allow them to graze part of the time. When you have caught a sufficient number or all you wish to take out it will be necessary to secure a herd of gentle horses to put your wild ones in with and take them out of the country.

ANOTHER method is to have a bunch of gentle horses located on the trail and to run the wild horses into the bunch of gentle horses, but this requires several men and is not as successful as the other method, as you get a lot of scrubs that you don't want and a good many of the best ones get away. You can't turn some of these wild horses at all, even when you have them so tired out that they can hardly go you can ride in front of them and they will simply split and go right around you, but will not turn off of their course. Still another method which has been used by wild horse hunters is to build corrals with wings running out for a half mile or a mile on each side of the corral,

Also if you can find out where the horses water

and keep them away from water you can also capture them fairly easily. Several years ago a man in Nebraska called Wild Horse Jerry used actually to capture wild horses on foot by just continuously keeping after them.

I have personally caught a good many wild horses, and some darn good ones, but I certainly could not advise any one to undertake capturing wild horses with a view to making a profit; but for a person who could afford it, with an adventurous turn of mind, and looking for thrills there aren't many games that would satisfy his soul to the fill as this, especially if when he caught a wild horse he would put his saddle and bridle on right then and ride him into camp.

If you would care to undertake this game you can outfit at Thermopolis, Wyoming, for the Big Horn country or Rawlins, Wyoming, for the Haystack region.

Ship

CAPTAIN DINGLE explodes another curious myth of the sea.

Request:—"Could you tell me whether it is now, or ever has been, the custom to change or renew the keel of a boat or ship if one desires to change the name of the vessel? My husband says it is and a friend of ours owning a yacht says it is not, and after getting no reliable information from a yacht club here my husband suggested my writing *Adventure.*" —JEAN MARVIN, Los Angeles, California

Reply, by Capt. A. E. Dingle:—There is certainly not now any rule requiring the renewing of a vessel's keel before changing her name. Does your husband think the great ships at present under your flag, taken from Germany during or after the war, had new keels placed? That would be quite a job for the *Leviathan!* Or the recently sold big fleet of squareriggers in Alaska—the majority of them fine old British ships under quite different names? Your yachting friend is right. You can get official information, by writing or visiting your Customs House—the Inspector of Steamboats. There is a *fee* for changing a name, however, and changing registry is another matter again.

Treasure Finder

ANY handy radio man can rig you up a device for locating underground minerals.

Request:—"I am interested in mineral deposit location by means of radio and electricity. Recently and during the past several years I have read of various radio and electrical devices which are designed to locate metal. Some are dubbed 'treasure finders' and others claim the ability to locate ore bodies. I have been following mining for some time and am quite well informed regarding 'doodle bugs' and various other divining rod schemes which are held strictly reliable by a certain class of miners. However, I believe that there is a possibility that buried mineral may be located by means of radio or electricity.

If you have any information on this subject or know where I can obtain the information, I would appreciate hearing from you."

—A. W. REBER, Sacramento, California

Reply, by Mr. Donald McNicol:—Yes, there have been several schemes for using electric circuit hookups to locate minerals underneath the surface of the earth. Formerly the idea was to use a large loop of about fifty turns of wire wound on a hoop, or square, about four feet in diameter; the wire in series with a couple of dry cells and a telephone receiver. Moving the coil over the earth was supposed to indicate the presence of mineral by induction noises in the telephone when metal came within range of the loop.

Recently a more elaborate hookup has been used, the same as the above but employing an audio amplifier (such as the audio stages of a radio receiver) to amplify the induction sounds. This works very well. Any handy radio service man could hook up a set for you from the above directions.

Fish

WHO has seen a muskellunge duel? So little is known of the year-round habits of game fish that anglers have an opportunity to add much to the present store of ichthyological information.

But are anglers dependable? Do they ever trouble themselves to learn the accurate scientific names of the fish they follow? For instance, what do you mean by "pike", or "pickerel", or "muskellunge"?

Request:—"This question is a strange one, perhaps a difficult one. It is:

How do male fish, especially muskellunge, fight with each other (if at all) during the mating season? Do they fight to the death, like wolves, or do they merely make a bluff at fighting, like moose, elk and deer? I wonder if they chase each other, biting each other's tails and fins as the tropical fish so often kept in an aquarium do. From certain things Canadian guides and trappers have told me, I am under the impression that the musky is monogamous, although he may not have the same mate every spring.

I hope this question does not sound absurd, because I would certainly like to know the answer."

—L. L. SWIFT, Cleveland Heights, Ohio

Reply, by Mr. G. S. Myers:—Your questions are not absurd, by any means, but I am afraid I can not help you much. Little is known to ichthyologists of the habits of our game fishes, other than those that are exhibited when the fish is at the end of a line.

This may seem remarkable, but with the exception of studies on the black basses, trout, salmon, and a few others, no careful scientific survey of the year-round habits of any of the game fishes has been made. Ichthyologists are so few and the species of fish are so many that we have had time to get around to comparatively few.

The guides and trappers who see something of the fishes all year round probably know more of these things, but you can never wholly rely on what they say for several reasons. In the first place (taking pike and muskies for example), you can never be sure what a man means when he says "pike", or "pickerel", or "muskellunge". If you don't believe me, get hold of Weed's little booklet on "Pike, Pickerel, and Muskellunge", which sells for 75c at the Field Museum, Chicago, and look up the section on common names, page 38. And by the way this book is the best out on these fish and ought to be in the hands of every angler.

To get back to the business at hand—practically every fish, big and little, with which I have had anything to do, fights the same way, just like little tropical fishes in an aquarium. In nearly all, the males fights in the breeding season, but in very few, under natural conditions, do they fight to the death. In the open waters, where escape is easy, one nearly always gets his fill and turns tail before fatal damage is done. And I have never, to my remembrance, seen fishes *play* at fighting. They *do* it! But the ones with small or no teeth can do little damage.

The biting of tails seen in aquarium fish is not real fighting. When fishes fight they usually approach each other slowly, with expanded and trembling fins, line up side by side and shake themselves in anger with a peculiar stiff rocking motion. Suddenly one lets go and takes a nip at the other. The fight is on, and with perhaps many rests and "rocking periods", they fight until one has had enough.

About the musky, both as to fighting and to monogamy, I can not say. I'd suggest that on this score you write to Mr. A. C. Weed, Field Museum, Chicago, who knows more about these fishes than any other one person.

Alaska

FREELANCE air pilots owning planes may find it a land of opportunity.

Request:—"Having read considerable of the adoption of the airplane by Alaska, I can not help wondering whether or not some of the large mining companies would have openings for men trained in aviation. If you can supply me with any information on this subject, I shall be most grateful."

—FRANK L. WILSON, Portland, Oregon

Reply, by Mr. Victor Shaw:—It is possible that large mining companies might have some use for a commercial plane pilot, though I doubt if any openings exist at present or ever have. Mail, passengers and light freight have been transported by plane in Alaska for the past 5, 6 years by local planes, also prospectors, trappers and mining men wishing to get quickly to properties in isolated districts that are snowbound.

Certainly a competent pilot owning a plane would have no trouble at all in picking up a good share of business. I know that this spring miners wanting to enter the Goodnews Bay district from Bethel on the Kukokwim River had to mush in with dogs as no planes were then available, being all in use at Teller or Nome on the Eilison-Borland search.

Anti-Aircraft Gun

FROM existing field artillery in 1914, to the highly specialized anti-aircraft guns of the latter part of the war.

Request:—"1. What is the approximate date that the first anti-aircraft gun went into action? I claim that there were no anti-aircraft guns during the first six months of the war.

2. Do you think the results they achieved justified their existence?"

—F. DEILER, New York City

Reply, by Capt. Glen R. Townsend:—1. It is difficult to answer the question as to when anti-aircraft guns were first used, for the reason that anti-aircraft artillery as we now know it was a development of the war. Existing guns were used for anti-aircraft fire almost from the first days of the war, however. For example, Maj. L. B. Boyd-Mass and Lieut. G. F. Pretyman, flying a British airplane at Le Cateau, August 26, 1914, reported at 1:06 P. M.: "Aircraft guns fired on us from the (German) landing place." Howitzers had fired at them earlier in the day and they were finally brought down the same day by rifle fire from German ground troops. I have also noted a report that German anti-aircraft guns were fired on British planes during the battle of the Aisne. Of course these were not anti-aircraft guns in the sense that we speak of them today but simply field artillery pieces adapted in the first days of the war to anti-aircraft fire.

2. Yes, the results achieved by anti-aircraft guns justified their existence. While the actual number of hits may have been comparatively small their moral effect was great and they tended to keep aircraft at a distance.

South Seas

HALCYON isles for those who are certain they'd enjoy the life.

Request:—"Here is an inquiry from a visionary, bereft of all vision but one, and that is a vision of a halcyon spot in the South Seas on which to die. A leisurely island is wanted, with rugged features as well as tropic profusion, which will nourish him to a large extent. An island free from the malignancy of fevers, missionaries, and industry. Inhabited and

a port of infrequent call. I am 46, not incapacitated mentally or physically, have druggist experience with 7 years 1st class clinical experience but can be sure of no more than $300.00 a year annuity. If all this leaves you cold and indifferent, the name I am obliged to sign will weigh in my favor." —A. P. YORICK, Palatine, Illinois

Reply, by Mr. James Stanley Meagher:—Alas! Poor Yorick, I do not know you personally, but I am rather well acquainted with visionaries in general. I know their longing for green isles far away, and sometimes I hesitate to destroy the bloom of romantic ideas which have grown in the garden of their fancy.

I could discourse on this theme and expand it into an article, but I must remember I am confined to the limits of a letter. Let it suffice therefore to say that if you are prepared to modify to some extent your ideas of "the romantic, glamorous and beautiful tropics" you can probably find a spot which approximates your dream. If you can forget the heat and the rain and the mosquitoes and several other things and lose yourself in artistic reverie in the contemplation of a tropical sunset you will probably be satisfied on your halcyon isle.

Through this department I am not indifferent to the letters of any of *Adventure's* readers, and my main idea is to steer a middle course, mixing my own ideas with a little straight information, leaving it finally to the reader to make his own decisions.

Bora-Bora and Moorea, two islands of the French Society group. Take your choice! The former is a little more rugged, a little more distant from the last outpost of commerce, a little less frequented. Both can boast of tropic profusion, deep dark jungles, rugged heights and white beaches. Bora-Bora is in the Leeward Isles about two days' sail by schooner from Papeete, Tahiti, whilst Moorea is across the channel from the latter port. The Society group is free from malaria and other fevers.

Don't figure too much on a South Sea Island to nourish you, as you are apt to tire very quickly of native *kai-kai*, or food. Several fellows tried to live native style in recent times and soon gave it up, some of them suffering from malnutrition. Fifty dollars a month is the minimum for living expenses if you have any kind of standard in mind. The only place where your druggist experience might be of value would be in the town of Papeete.

Aliens coming into the French colonies to live must pay a head tax of $20.00, and passports must be visaed by the French consul at San Francisco.

Motor Camp

USEFUL information for the first long trip.

Request:—"I am contemplating an auto trip which will take several months. I have had very little experience with auto camping equipment, and I therefore come to you for advice.

Please give me the benefit of your experience on the following points:

1. Size, quality and model of tent.
2. Beds and bedding.
3. Cooking equipment and table ware.
4. Other equipment for camping—such as tables, chairs and containers for water and food supply.
5. Methods of transporting equipment.

There are only three of us in the family. The child is a boy of eleven."

—A. M. MEVIG, Park Rapids, Minnesota

Reply, by Mr. John D. Long:—1. Get a square tent of the umbrella type which has been waterproofed and has a sewed-in waterproof floor. Eight ft. sq. will do for two persons. Write to Sears-Roebuck or Montgomery Ward of Chicago for camping equipment catalogs.

2. You can get folding metal cots very cheaply, if you wish to sleep on cots. I usually prefer to sleep on the floor cloth with a blanket or two under me. It is warmer, should the night be chilly. On a cot you will need twice as many blankets beneath as over you.

3. Get an outfit of folding cooking utensils, folding table and nesting pots and pans and Camp Cook gasoline stove. You can get them from the mail order houses.

4. Folding metal chairs can also be had cheaply from the same. If you are going to camp where it is hot and dry get a water bag. When suspended in a dry wind a water bag will cool your water nicely, but where it is cooler or more moist there will be little evaporation and naturally the water will not cool. You will, of course, have a pail for carrying water. For perishable food (milk, butter, etc.) you can get a running board refrigerator that will require very little ice. There are iceless refrigerators that use such chemicals as hyposulphite of soda, which on being wet will fall about 30 deg., but they are not very satisfactory.

5. Duffle bags of waterproofed canvas that can go on the running boards of the car are about the best for carrying equipment. They are kept in place by ordinary luggage carriers which are screwed fast to the running board. There are car beds made for almost every type of car and your boy could sleep in the car quite comfortably. Many make a home-made car bed by hinging the front seat so that it can be bent back.

Sword

TODAY the saber is a mere symbol of rank; and only eleven men in the entire A.E.F. suffered wounds from the sword.

Request:—"Will you kindly describe and compare the following named weapons? Sword, saber, cutlass, claymore, small sword, épée, rapier and foil."

—LIEUT. FRED E. BRAKE, Waynesboro, Pennsylvania

Reply, by Mr. Robert E. Gardner:—A sword is a weapon having a long and usually sharp pointed blade with a cutting edge, or edges. All types, i. e. small sword, rapier, épée, analace, simitar, etc., are simply different forms of the sword.

The saber is the typical cavalry weapon, the distinguishing feature of which is the single edged blade. They can be curved or straight bladed and used for both cut and thrust. Usually double edged at point.

The cutlass is very like the saber save that it is usually short with a solid, cup-like hilt that sweeps away from the knuckle guard to protect the entire hand. The weapon of the naval forces.

The true claymore is an early sixteenth century, two-handed sword of the cutting classification; cross hilted with the quillons down bent (toward point) and usually pierced at the ends. Can be single handed; is always straight bladed and two edged. "Claymore" is from the Gaelic "Claiheammor" or "great sword" and is erroneously applied to the basket hilted Scotch broadswords which were developed during the early eighteenth century.

The "small" or "court" sword was developed toward the close of the seventeenth century and is simply a rapier on a reduced scale. The long, handsome Hispano-Italian rapiers of the early seventeenth century grew to such proportion that it became necessary to regulate their length and, as they were very much in the way in the crowded halls of the court, they fell into disfavor, being replaced by the small sword. The hilts were simplified, being usually equipped with a small shell guard and simple knuckle guard.

Following the introduction of the first thrusting sword—the *estoc*—the cross hilted swords began a series of changes which led into the perfected rapier. The heavy blades of the early knightly swords were narrowed and the cross hilt was given its first addition—the finger ring. From this start the handsome rapiers of the Musketeers were developed. Many and varied are the hilts, and the blades were of several cross section forms; flat, two-edged, triangular, diamond and flattened diamond shaped blades were met with. The period of the true rapier embraces the years 1550 to 1700. After the passing of the rapier the small sword came into use to remain through the eighteenth century. With the dawn of the nineteenth century the story of the sword as an important weapon was brought to a close. Only eleven men suffered wounds from the sword in the entire A. E. F. At the present time the foil or épée exists only as sporting equipment and the saber as a symbol of rank.

Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

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4. **Be Definite**—Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

A Complete list of the "Ask Adventure" experts appears in the issue of the fifteenth of each month

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A Story of the Border Cavalry

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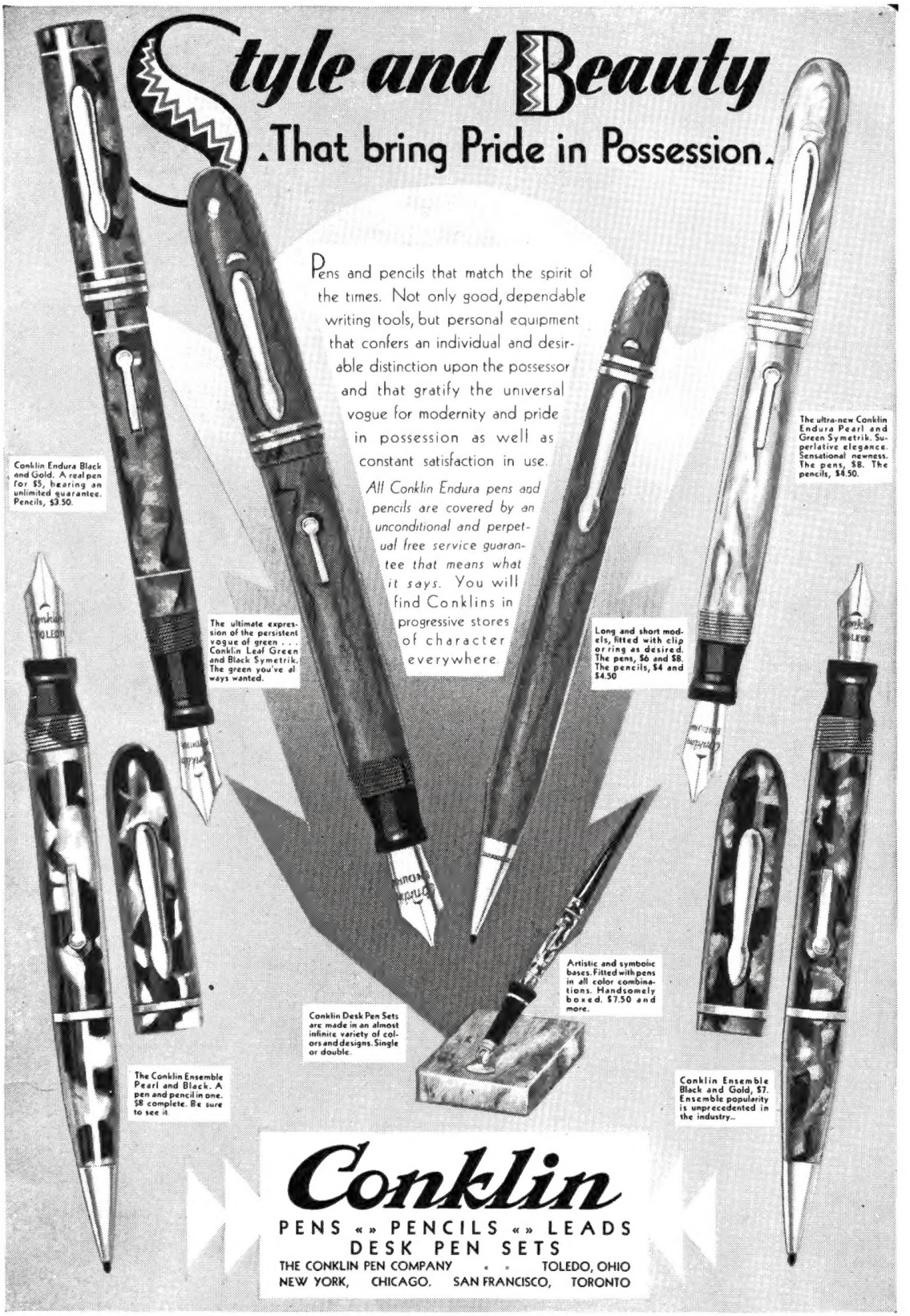

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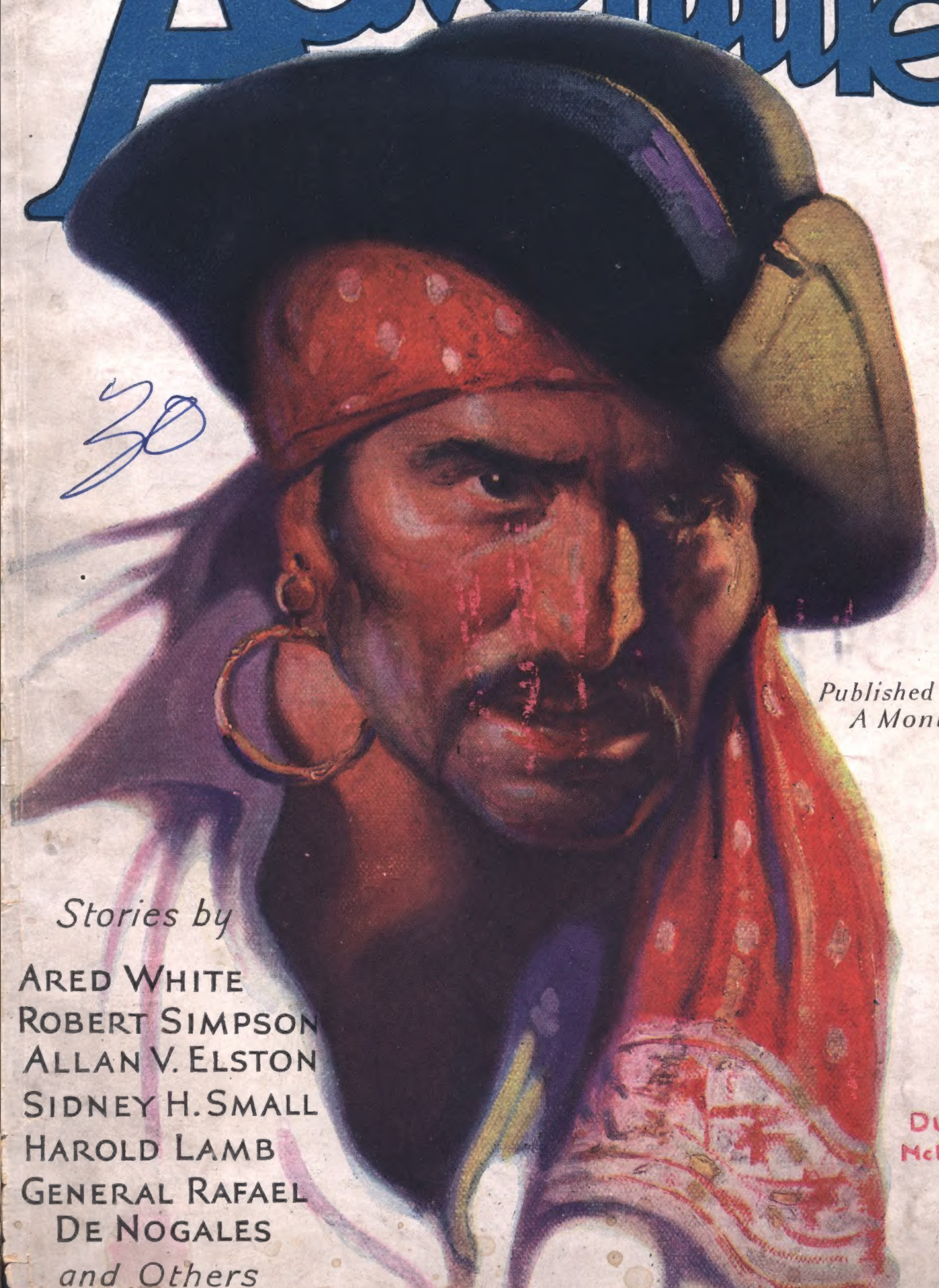

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